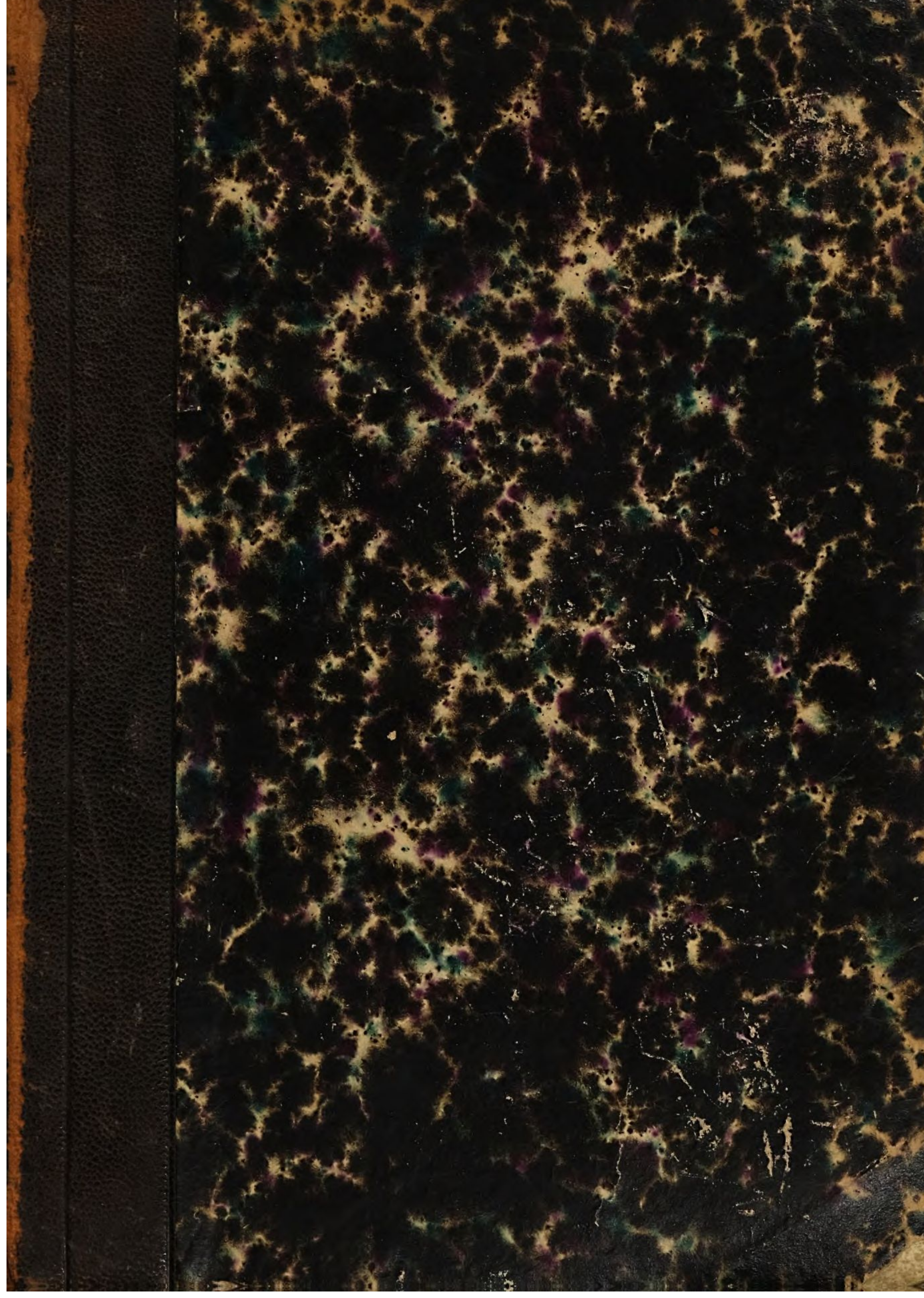




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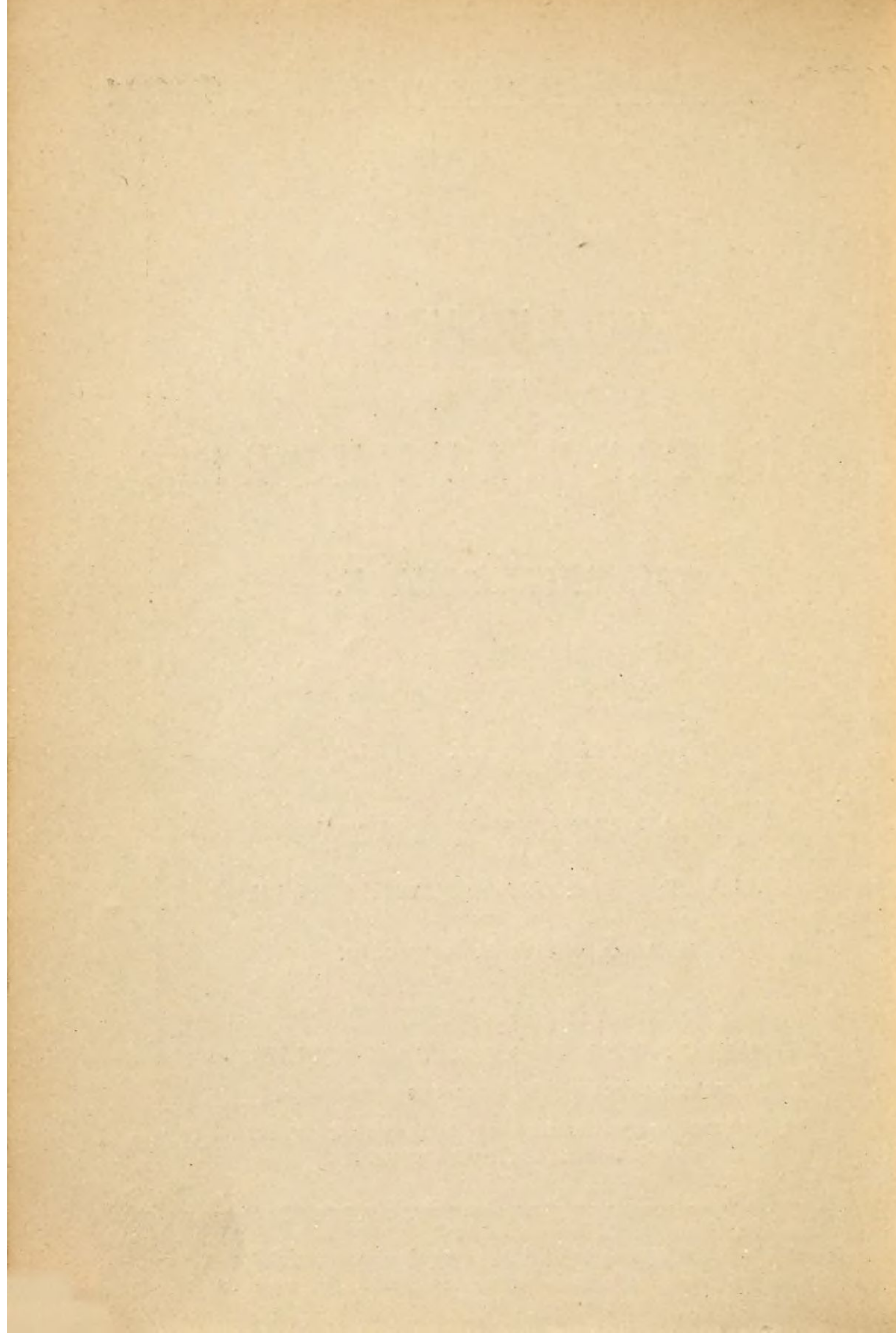
IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 2.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

GOVERNMENT

OF

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

COMMISSIONER OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

REPORT

OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

FOR THE YEAR 1898

IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

1898

READY-MONEY
MORTIBOY.

A MATTER-OF-FACT STORY.

BY

WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE,

AUTHORS OF "THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1884.

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READY-MONEY MORTIBOY.

A MATTER-OF-FACT STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE Street, as Frank stepped into it from Dick's hotel, was alive with people, for the night was warm and fine. He bade his rich cousin good night, in his easy pleasant way, never hinting at the sore straits to which he was reduced. Dick was rather inclined to believe, indeed, from what little information he was able to elicit from Frank, that Art paid;—that Frank got a living at it, at all events, he was too proud to be helped when he saw the chance of doing well without help. Now, Dick rather admired this phase of Frank's character—as who would not? Yet he resolved that, when he saw him the next day, he would compel him to disclose the state of his finances and his prospects. While one cousin thought this, the other hesitated a moment in front of the hotel, remembering suddenly that he had no bed to go to. It was a curious sensation, the most novel he had ever experienced. No bed. Nowhere to go to. No money, or next to none, in his pocket. Nothing at all resembling a home. Even a portable tent, or a Rob

Roy canoe, would have been something. He shook himself all over, like a dog. Then he laughed, for he had had a capital day and a good dinner, and he was only five-and-twenty.

"Hang it," he said, "a night in the open won't kill one, I suppose. Dick Mortiboy must have had many in his travelling days."

Then he lit a cigar. Dick had forced a dozen upon him—which, with that curious feeling that permits a man to take anything except money from another, Frank accepted with real gratitude. With his hands in his pockets, and his hat well back on his head, as all old Eton boys wear it, he strolled westward, turning things over in his mind in that resignedly amused frame of mind which comes upon the most unhappy wight after a bottle and a half of claret. Our ancestors, in their kindly brutality, permitted condemned criminals to have a long drink on the way to Tyburn. The punchbowl was brought out somewhere near the site of the Marble Arch; and the *condamné*, fortified and brightened up by the drink, ascended the ladder with a jaunty air, and kicked off his shoes before an admiring populace;—just as well, it seems to me, as keeping the poor wretch low, and making him feel all his misery up to the very last. Frank, having had his bowl of punch, was about to embark upon that wild and hopeless voyage of despair, which consists in sailing from port to port, looking for employment and finding none. There are certain ships to be met with in the different havens of the world, which are from time to time to be found putting in, "seeking." They never find. From Valparaiso they go to Rio; from Pernambuco to Port Louis; from Calcutta to Kingston;

from Havana to Shanghai. They are always roving about the ocean, always "seeking," and always in ballast. Who are their owners; how the grizzled old skipper keeps his crew together; how they pay for the pickled pork and rum in which they delight; how they have credit for repairs to rigging and sails; how the ship is docked, and scraped, and kept afloat—all these things are a profound mystery. After a time, as I have reason for believing, they disappear; but this must be when there is no longer any credit possible, and all the ports in the world are closed to them. Probably at this juncture the skipper calls together his men, makes the weather-beaten tars a speech, tells them that their long and happy voyages must now terminate, because there is no more pickled pork and no more rum, and discloses to them a long-hidden secret. They cheer feebly, set the sails once more, turn her head due North, and steer away to that warm, windless, iceless ocean at the North Pole, where all vagrom ships betake themselves at last, and live together in peace and harmony far from the storms of the world.

Which things are an allegory. Ships are but as men. The North Pole ocean is as that hidden deep where dwell the men who have "gone under." They "go under" every day, falling off at each reverse more and more from the paths of honesty. One of them called on me a week ago. I had met him once, and only once, at Oxford, years since. He shook hands with me as with his oldest and best friend; he sat down; he drank my sherry; he called me old fellow; and presently, when he thought my heart was open to the soft influence of pity, he told me his tale, and—borrowed thirty shillings. He went away. Of

course, I found that his tale was all a lie. He is welcome to his thirty shillings, with which I have earned the right of shutting my door in the face of a man who has gone under.

Was Frank thinking of all this as he walked through the squares that clear, bright night, among the houses lit up for balls, and the carriages bearing their precious treasures of dainty women? I know not. The thoughts of a man who has but six and sixpence in his pocket, and no bed to go to, are like a child's. They are long, long thoughts. If it is cold and rainy, if he is hungry or ill, he despairs and blasphemes. If it is bright and warm, if he is well-fed and young, he laughs and sings, with a secret, half-felt sinking of the heart, and a looking forward to evil times close at hand.

Along the squares, outside the great houses where the rich, and therefore happy, were dancing and feasting, thinking little enough (why should they?) about the poor, and therefore miserable, outside—beggars came up to Frank. One old man, who looked as if he had been a gentleman, stood in front of him suddenly.

"Give me something," he said, bringing his clenched fists down at his sides in a gesture of despair. "Give me something. I am desperately poor."

Frank put sixpence into his hand and passed on.

"Only six shillings left now," he thought.

Women—those dreadful women, all alike, who belong to certain districts of London, and appear only late at night—begged of him. These women apparently form a class peculiar to themselves. They are neither old nor young. They carry a baby. They are dressed in rusty black. They bear in one hand three boxes of cigar lights. They address you as "good gentle-

man," and claim to have six starving babies at home, and nothing to put in their mouths. Then the boys with cigar lights ran after him; and then more sturdy beggars, more women, and more boys.

He walked on. It struck ten. Frank's cigar was finished. Just then he passed—it was in one of those dingy, characterless streets, near the great squares—a low-browed, retiring-looking public house. From its doors issued the refrain of a song, the clinking of glasses, and stamping of feet. Frank stopped.

"I've got exactly six shillings," he said. "I may surely have a glass of beer out of that."

He went in and drank his glass. As he drank it, another song, horribly sung, began in the room behind the bar.

"Like to go in, sir?" asked the barmaid. "It's quite full. We hold it every Monday evening."

Frank thought he might as well sit down, and see what was going on—particularly as there appeared to be no charge for admission.

It was a long, low room at the back, filled with about thirty men, chiefly petty tradesmen of the neighbourhood. Every man was smoking a long clay pipe, and had a tumbler before him. Every man was perfectly sober, and wore an air of solemnity exceedingly comic. One of the men—the most solemn and the most comic—occupied the chair. By his right stood a piano, where a pale-faced boy of eighteen or so was playing accompaniments to the songs. A gentleman with a red face and white hair was sitting well back in his chair, holding his pipe straight out before him, chanting with tremendous emphasis and some difficulty—because he was short of breath. This, and not an

imperfect education, caused him to accentuate his aspirates more strongly than was actually required:—

“Ho! the ma-hades of me-herry Hengle-land,
How be-hew-ti-ful hare they!”

Somewhat apart from the rest, not at the table—as if he did not belong to them—sat a man of entirely different appearance. He was gorgeously attired in a brown velvet coat and white waistcoat, with a great profusion of gold chain and studs. He was about five-and-forty years of age. His features were highly Jewish, with the full lips and large nose of that Semitic race. His hair, thick and black, lay in massive rolls on an enormous great head—the biggest head, Frank thought, that he had ever seen. In his hand, big in proportion, was a tumbler of iced soda and brandy. He was smoking a cigar, and beating time impatiently on the arm of his chair.

Frank sat modestly beside him, and ordered another glass of beer.

“Know this place, sir?” asked the man with the big head, turning to him.

“Never saw it before,” said Frank.

“No more did I. Queer crib, isn’t it? I turned in by accident, because I was thirsty. They’ll ask you to sing directly. Do, if you can.”

The “Maids of Merry England” died away in the last bars which those who were behind time added to the original melody; and the chairman, taking up his tumbler, bowed to the singer, and said solemnly—

“Mr. Pipkin, sir, your health and song.”

The company all did the same. Mr. Pipkin wiped his brow, and took a long pull at his gin and water.

"Now," said the chairman, persuasively, "who is going to oblige the company with the next song?"

Dead silence.

"Perhaps one of the visitors"—here he looked at Frank—"will oblige us?"

"If you can sing, do," growled Bighead.

"Really," said Frank, "I am afraid I hardly know any song that would please; but, if you like, I will sing a little thing I made myself once, words and music too."

"Hear, hear!" said the chair. "Silence, if you please, gentlemen, for the gentleman's song. Gentlemen, the gentleman written it himself."

Frank took the place of the pale-cheeked musician, and played his prelude. He was going to sing a song which he made at Cambridge, and used to sing at wines and suppers.

"It's only a very little thing," he said, addressing the audience generally. "If you don't like it, pray stop me at the first verse. It never had a name."

"There was Kate, with an eye like a hawk;

There was Blanche, with an eye like a fawn;

There was Fanny, as fresh as the rose on its stalk;

And Annie, as bright as the dawn.

There were Polly, and Dolly, and Jessie, and Rose,

They were fair, they were dark, they were short, they were tall;

I changed like a weathercock when the wind blows,

For I loved them all—and I loved them all.

"Like the showers and sunshine of spring,

The quarrels and kisses I had;

Like a forest-bird fledgeling trying its wing,

Is the flight of the heart of a lad.

Oh! Annie and Fanny, and Jessie and Kate,

How love vows perish, and promises fall!

You were all pledged to me, and I wasn't your fate;
But I loved you all—and I loved you all.

“'Twas Annie I kissed in the wood,
And Fanny kissed me in the lane;
But Rosie held out, as a young maiden should,
Till she found I'd not ask her again.
Now they're married, and mothers, and all,
And 'tis Lucy clings close to my breast;
And we never tell her, what we never recall—
For I love my wife—how I loved the rest.”

“Bravo!” growled the man with the big head.
“Bravo! young fellow. Devilish well sung.”

“Sir,” said the chairman, “your health and song.”

“Don't get up,” said Bighead; “sing another. Look here, sing that. Mr. Chairman, the gentleman's going to sing another song.”

It was “Adelaïde,” that supreme tenor song—the song of songs—that the man handed to Frank. He took it from a portfolio which was standing beside him.

“Yes,” he said, nodding, “I'm a sort of professional, and I know a good voice when I hear it. Can you play the accompaniment? If not, I will.”

Frank yielded him the seat, and took the music. Yes, he could sing “Adelaïde.” But how long since he sang it last! And—ah me!—in what altered circumstances!

But he sang. With all the sweetness and power of his voice he filled the room—laden with the air of so many pipes and reeking tumblers—with the yearnings of passion, which have never found such utterance as in this great song. The honest folk behind their pipes sat in amazement, half comprehending—but only half. The barmaid crept from behind the counter to the door, and listened: when the song was finished, she

went back with tears in her eyes, and a throbbing heart. She was not too old to feel the yearning after love. The pale-faced young musician listened till his cheeks glowed and his eyes brightened: the poor boy had dreams beyond his miserable surroundings. The player—the big-headed man—as he played, wagged his head, and shook his curls, and let the tears roll down his great big nose, and drop upon the keys. For Frank, forgetting where he was, and remembering his love, and how he sang that song last to her, poured out his heart into the notes, and sang as one inspired.

“Come with me,” said Bighead, seizing him by the arm as soon as he had finished. “Come away. Let us talk, you and I—let us talk.”

He dragged him into the street. The clocks were striking twelve.

“Which is your way?”

“Which is yours?” said Frank.

The man moved his fat forefinger slowly round his head in a complete circle.

“All ways,” he said. “Let me walk part of your way.”

Frank turned to the left. It mattered nothing.

“Are you rich?—you are a gentleman, I see—but are you rich, happy, satisfied, contented, money in your pocket, money in the bank, therefore virtuous and respected?”

“No—I am none of these things.”

“Then make yourself all these. Sing for money. Go on the stage. Good God, man!—Giuglini himself had not so sweet a voice. Give me your name and

address." Frank hesitated. "Well, then, take mine." He gave him a card. "Will you come and see me? That can do you no harm, you know. Come."

"Candidly," said Frank, "I am looking for employment. But I would rather not sing for money."

"Rubbish! *I've* done it. *I've* sung second basso at the Italian Opera. Not sing for money! Why not? You'd write for money, I suppose? You'd paint for money? Why not sing? Now, come and pay me a visit, and talk it over."

"I must look about first. Are you really serious?"

"Quite. I don't care how it is you've got into a hole—whether it's money, or what it is. On the boards, nobody cares much."

"You are quite welcome to know everything, so far as I am concerned," said Frank, proudly.

"So much the better. Then no offence. When will you come?"

"I will look for occupation to-morrow. If I don't get it, I will call on you in the afternoon."

"To-morrow. Good. Of course you won't get anything to do. How should you? Nobody ever gets anything to do. Good night, my dear sir. For heaven's sake, take care of your throat. Do wrap it up. Let me lend you a wrapper."

He took a clean red silk handkerchief out of his pocket, unfolded it, and wrapped it round Frank's throat, tenderly and softly. In the eyes of the big-headed man, Frank's voice was a fortune.

"Good heavens! if anything were to happen to an organ like that from exposure! Are you going to smoke again? Then take one of my cigars—they must be better than yours."

"Mine are good enough, I think," said Frank, laughing, offering him one.

"Let me look—let me look. Yes, they're very fair. Don't smoke too much. And—and—" here he held out his hand—"Good-bye. Good-bye. Mind you come to see me. For heaven's sake, take care."

He strode away, leaving his red silk handkerchief round Frank's neck; and presently Frank heard him hail a Hansom in stentorian tones, and drive off. Then he was left alone, began to feel a little cold, as if the weather had suddenly changed.

CHAPTER II.

HALF-PAST twelve. The air of the streets is close and stifling. The Mall, St. James's Park, is still crowded. No wonder: for the air of the park is fresh, and the moonlight lies soft and bright on the trees. Frank slowly descends the steps at the Duke of York's column, and proceeds to search for a resting-place. All the seats—he counted them as he went along, forty—appear to be full, some of them occupied by men stretched at full length, others by women sitting two and three together. All the way to Buckingham Palace there is not a single chance even of sitting room.

"Very odd," said Frank, returning, "that the same idea should strike all these people as well as myself. What is to be done next?"

The problem solved itself as he came to the next seat, where a man was lying at full length. He suddenly rolled round, and came with a heavy thud on

the gravel. Picking himself up, he staggered to where Frank was standing.

"I shay, old f'l'r—don't take that place, be-because it's going round."

Then he disappeared.

Frank sat down, and, stretching his legs on the wood, pulled his hat over his eyes, and tried to go to sleep.

It was of no use. Just as he was dropping off a cab would come by. People talked as they walked past. A breath of the night air touched his cheek, and reminded him, that he was not in bed. Besides, the bench was as hard as a third-class railway carriage. Even to an old campaigner, wood makes a poor substitute for a spring mattress.

"Hang these knots," said Frank, as the clock struck one. "I had no idea that knots were so much harder than common wood."

He shifted his position, and tried to persuade himself that he was getting sleepy.

"Adversity," he murmured, "makes one acquainted with strange beds. The advantage of the situation is, one is not afraid of fleas."

A caterpillar fell upon his nose.

He sat up in disgust.

"Alternative. We may have caterpillars if we lie under a tree, or we may be watered by the fresh dew from Heaven if we take a bench outside a tree. Which shall we do? Let us consider."

He lay back, and fell asleep.

Five minutes after he lost consciousness, he was awakened by something touching his feet. He started up from a dream of soft couches,

"I beg a thousand pardons," said a soft voice. "I thought there was room for two."

The speaker, as the half light of a summer night, not to speak of the gas, showed him, was a tall and rather handsome man of thirty or so, dressed in a frock coat. Frank noticed at once that the heels of his boots, as the lamp shone on them, were worn to the stumps. Further investigation showed that there were no signs of collar or shirt, and that his hat, as he took it off with a polite wave, was limp at the brim. By daylight, what appeared now as glossiness, would have shown as grease; but this it was impossible to tell by the moonlight.

"I dare say there's room for two," said Frank, "if we economize legs."

The stranger gravely took his place, and they divided the space so as to admit of four legs, all rather longer than the average.

"Do you a—often—use this place?" inquired the stranger.

"No," said Frank, with a laugh, half in bitterness. "This is the first time that I have tried the hotel. Perhaps it will not be the last. I find it draughty—exposed, perhaps, in situation. No doubt, extremely healthy."

"Ah!" said the other, with a ready sympathy. "You have, however, let me assure you, the very best bench, for a warm night, in the whole park. Are you sleepy, sir?"

"Not very. Who the devil can sleep here?"

"When you are used to it, it is really not bad for two or three months in the year. If I only had some tobacco, I should be quite comfortable."

"Take a cigar. I've got a few left."

He pulled out his case, and handed it to his newly-made acquaintance.

"A thousand thanks. When I was in the 4th Buffs—you've heard of that regiment?—I used to buy my cigars at Hudson's. I've got to smoke shag now, and can't always get that. A capital cigar. I'm *very* much obliged to you, sir—very—much—obliged—indeed. A very good cigar. If you were to keep them for a year in tea, you would find them ripen better, perhaps. But a very good cigar. I suppose you are——hard up?"

"Yes. Most of the visitors at this caravanserai are, I presume."

"In the service?"

"No."

"Ah! Excuse my impertinence. Well, I had my fling, and here I am. What does it matter to a philosopher?"

A slouching figure came by, apparently clad in the cast-off rags of some field scarecrow. He stopped before Frank's new friend.

"Night, Major."

"Good night to you, Jacob," said the other, with a patronizing air. "Things been going pretty well to-day?"

"No, dam bad. Here's your sixpence, Major."

He handed over the amount in coppers, lay down on the gravel, with his head on his arm, and in a moment was sound asleep, and snoring heavily.

"A humble retainer of mine," said the Major. "A follower, rather than a servant. Poor, as you see, but faithful. He does odd jobs for me, and I keep him going. Not a gentleman, you observe."

Frank laughed silently.

"It's a glorious thing, a good fling," said the Major. "Though it's ten years since I had mine, and it only lasted two years, I remember every day of it. You remember Kitty Nelaton, of the Adelphi?"

"No. Never had the pleasure of her acquaintance."

"A splendid woman. That, of course, was allowed. I took her, sir, from the Duke of Brentwood. His Grace nearly went mad with rage. Ah, I think I see myself now, tooling down to Richmond the loveliest pair of grays, I suppose, that ever were seen. But she was so devilish expensive. And I had a good year, too: got on the right thing for the Derby, landed at Ascot and Goodwood, and didn't do badly at Newmarket. Shall I tell you the story of my misfortunes?"

"Do," said Frank—"if it will not bore you."

"Not at all. It's a pleasure to talk to a gentleman; and besides, this is a capital cigar. It's ten years ago. Some of the other men have gone to grief, too; so that I'm not without companions. We meet sometimes, and have a talk over old times. Odd thing life is. If I could put all my experiences in a book, sir, by gad you'd be astonished. The revelations I could make about paper, for instance; the little transactions in horse-flesh—eh? and other kinds of——"

"I beg your pardon," said Frank, who had dropped off to sleep, and was awakened by his head nearly nodding him off the bench. "You were saying——"

"Let me begin at the beginning," said the Major, sucking his cigar, and beginning his story with the relish that "unfortunate" men always manifest in relating their misadventures, "I was the second son of a Norfolk baronet. Of course, as the second son, I had

not much to look for from the family estate. However, I entered the army, and at once became—I may say, deservedly—the most popular man in the regiment. This was owing partly, perhaps, to my personal good looks, partly to a certain superiority of breeding which my family was ever remarkable for. Then, I was the best actor, the best billiard-player, the best cricketer, the smartest officer in the whole garrison. This naturally led to certain successes which it would be sham modesty, at this lapse of time, to ignore. Do not you think so?”

“Humph—gr—umph,” was Frank’s reply.

He was sound asleep, and the rest of the Major’s revelations were consequently not wanted. From the thrilling interest of the commencement, it may be conjectured that no greater misfortune could happen to the British public than Frank’s collapse. But he was a very unlucky man at this juncture of his fortunes.

He slept two or three hours. He was awakened by a pressure at the chest.

He started up, and just had time to grip the wrist of the respectable Mr. Jacob as that worthy was abstracting his watch and chain. Frank was strong as well as young. Jacob was neither young nor strong. Consequently, in less time than it takes to write this line, the watch and chain were back in their owner’s pocket, and the luckless Jacob was despatched with many kicks and a little strong language.

The Major was gone.

Frank rubbed his eyes, and sat down again. It was past four, broad daylight, and the sun had risen, as the gilded clock-tower plainly showed.

“Where’s the Major?” thought Frank. “Did I

dream? Was there a Major, or was it a nightmare? He began to tell me a story about somebody—Kitty somebody. I wonder if the six shillings are safe. Yes—here they are. What the deuce am I to do now?”

A lovely morning: a sweet, delicious air. London fresh and bright, as if night had cleaned it and swept it.

He got up, refreshed by his light sleep, and strolled down the silent avenue. On his right lay the sleepers upon the benches: poor bundles of rags, mostly; here and there, a woman with a baby: sometimes a girl, pale-faced and emaciated—perhaps a poor shirtmaker, starving in spite of virtue, because virtue, though it brings its own reward, does not always suffer that reward to take the form of a negotiable currency; sometimes a poor creature with cheeks that had once been fair, and had lately been painted—because vice though it sometimes brings sacks full of money with it, has a trick of running away with all of it in surprising and unexpected ways.

Frank stopped, and looked at one of them. She half opened her eyes. He listened. She murmured, “I shan’t move on,” and then went to sleep again. A few poor remains of finery were on her: a few tags of ribbon; a displaced chignon; a bonnet that had once been flaunting; little brodequins that had once been neat and pretty; a silk dress that had once not been discoloured and bespattered with street mud. Frank was touched with pity. He stooped over her, and spoke to her. She awoke, started up, and smiled—a horrid, ghastly smile, the memory of which haunted him afterwards.

"Why do you sleep here?" he asked, a foolish question, because there could be only one reason.

"Because I've got no money."

"What do you do in the day?"

"I hide. I come out at night, like the bats." She laughed discordantly. "Give me something, if you have anything."

"I've got six shillings. There are two for you."

"You're a good sort."

She pulled herself together, and got off the seat yawning.

"You had better finish your sleep."

"I have finished. I'm too hungry to sleep any longer. Now I shall go and buy something to eat. I must wake up my sister first, though."

She went and shook a figure in black stuff, without a chignon, who lay on the next bench. A woman about thirty—pale, thin, uncomely, long-suffering.

"Yes," said the first woman, "you see us both. Tilly was the good one. I'm the bad one. Good or bad, it makes no difference. We've got to starve all the same."

Frank shuddered. Is there nothing, then, in virtue? Can nothing ward off the evils of fate? Is there no power in self-denial, in bitter privation, to change remorseless circumstances, to stave off the miseries allotted by *ἀνάγκη*?

"Good or bad," she repeated, "it's all the same. Just as I told her ten years ago, when I was Kitty Nelaton, and she——"

"Good heavens! Am I dreaming?" said Frank, putting his hand to his head.

"Yes, Kitty Nelaton, of the Adelphi; and she was

Tilly Jones the shirtmaker. And here we are, you see. Come Tilly, my dear."

"Stop," said Frank. "I've got four shillings more. Take two of them. I've got a watch and chain that I shall pawn by and by. Don't say there's no difference between good and bad. Don't, for God's sake, Kitty!"

The tears stood in his eyes.

"I told you so," said the other woman, in a dull, pathetic way. "I always told you so."

The enthusiasm of virtue had long since been crushed out of her by dire penury; but now that nothing else was possible, the habit of preaching virtue remained; and, like many preachers, who have small faith or none in their own creeds, she went on in the same old strain, repeating dead words to lifeless ears.

But they took the money, and went away. Frank noticed how they crawled like a pair of old women. But the elder to appearance, the younger in reality by five or six years, was the poor worn-out shirtmaker.

"Let me get out of this place," said Frank. "I should go mad if I came here another night."

It was at the time when the Embankment was building but not quite finished. Frank went down to the grand old river, which was at high tide, and saw—in the clear, bright air of early dawn, when the black pall of smoke over London lifts and is driven away, only to come back again when men rise from their beds—the towers and spires of the mighty city standing out against the blue sky of the morning.

He communed with himself. In that bright air, it was impossible to feel unhappy. At the age of five-and-twenty, it is impossible not to see hope in everything. Besides, there was literally nothing that he

could reproach himself with. His life had been blameless. If we are to go by sins, Frank had none;—I speak as a layman. If we are to go by aims and hopes, Frank's were pure and lofty;—I speak as a layman. If to desire only what is good and right be in itself good and right, then was Frank, at this moment, one of the best of God's creatures. Perhaps I speak as a fool, but indeed I think he was. To few is it given to be so single-hearted and so pure. One sorrow he had, and one hope. That his father's name should be tarnished, was his sorrow. To wipe out the stain, and at the same time to win his love, was his hope.

But how?

He thought of the man with the big head, who wanted to employ him. This was clearly not the way to get large sums of money, or a great name. But yet—not yet. Two shillings in money—now that Kitty and Tilly were provided with the means of getting through the day—was all that he had in his pocket. Besides this, a silver watch and a chain, which might together fetch five pounds at a pawnbroker's.

It struck six.

"I'm hungry," said Frank, "and I'm dirty. Both are disagreeable things."

He left the Embankment, went up into the Strand, and had a cup of coffee and a piece of bread—giving twopence to the waiter, like a good Samaritan. The waiter had never had so much money presented to him, in the way of his calling, in all his life before. But instead of showing gratitude, he ran away to an inner apartment, for fear it might be a mistake.

Then he went to the old Roman bath, where he

had a plunge in the coldest water in the world, south of the Arctic pole, and came out glowing and strong.

It was only half-past six, so he went back to the Embankment, and smoked a cigar, thinking what he should do next.

"Time goes very slowly for poor people," he reflected. "That, I suppose, is a compensation to them, because it flies so swiftly for the rich."

CHAPTER III.

"PAVING-STONES come to feel hard after walking about on them for twenty-four hours or so, no doubt." Frank said to himself as he strolled along the Embankment, looking in vain for a seat. A policeman passed him. "Now, who would be a bobby?" he thought. "An awful time of it they must have. Yet I might put on the blue. I suppose I could procure a nomination. I might come down to that, and yet be—— No; a gentleman drives a Hansom, or he enlists as a soldier, but nobody ever heard of a gentleman in the police force. Officers, it is true; but even a metropolitan magistrate has never yet complimented them on their gentlemanlike demeanour in the box. Prejudices are queer things. I confess—though I haven't many left—I have an objection to the force. Francis Melliship you must really aim higher than the police force."

He pulled out his watch. It had stopped at half-past six. The key was at Islington. He looked up at the clock tower. It was a quarter to nine.

"A quarter to nine. I am getting hungry again. Remarkable thing. I do not remember being hungry before 9 a.m. since I left school. My appetite is be-

coming serious and embarrassing. 'The wind,' as the old French proverb very prettily says, though King David and Sterne generally get the credit of it, 'is tempered to the shorn lamb.' My experience is, that his appetite does not suit itself to his circumstances. Hang it, I must have some breakfast, and as well now as in an hour's time."

He walked through the Temple into Fleet-street. In the window of a modest-looking coffee-house, an impracticable china teapot, surrounded by freshly cut chops and rashers of ham, gave notice to hungry men that breakfast was to be had within.

Frank took a seat in a box near the door, and ordered his meal; ate it with the greatest relish, and wondered if Dick Mortiboy was up, and whether he would be surprised if his cousin failed to keep his appointment with him.

Then he took up that wonderful chronicle, the advertisement sheet of the *Times*. Order in disorder, if you happen to know where to look for things. Frank did not; so he looked at every page but the right before his eyes caught the columns of Wanted and Want Places. He read the list—the contents of which everybody knows perfectly well, because it never alters—with the curiosity of one interested. He was struck, of course, with that coincidence of people advertising for a place in terms that exactly suit the apparent requirements of people advertising for a person. Everybody has noticed this peculiarity, and novelists have made the most of it.

"Why don't they read this paper, apply for the vacant places, and save their money?" was his reflection.

Any number of cooks and clerks were wanted by advertisers; any number of "gentlemen," possessed of every possible qualification, advertised for employment for time, capital, or both.

There was not in the list one advertisement which seemed to fit his case. Stay, there was one—a secretary was wanted for an established public company. "A knowledge of the Fine Arts absolutely requisite. Preference will be given to a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge." Frank wrote down the address in his pocket-book. It was an Agency; and Frank Melliship had neither heard nor read, nor learned from experience, that of all the humbugs in a city full of them, Agencies of all sorts are the greatest humbugs. And the very cream of these swindles are Agencies that rob those poor wretches who, having tried every other method of getting employment, as a last resource enter one of these spiders' dens. I will give an example of their common method of procedure, which is representative. I will take a Servants' Agency to serve my purpose.

Here is a copy of an advertisement from the *Times*. You may see one similarly catching any day and every day:—

GENERAL SERVANT. Is a good PLAIN COOK. Has no objection to undertake washing. Fond of children. Age 24. From the country. Clean, active, willing, and obliging. Waits well at table. 3½ years excellent character. Wages £9.—"Mary," Mrs. —, — Street.

This advertisement appears in the *Times*, the *Telegraph*, and the *Standard* on the same day. The advertisements cost—say fourteen shillings altogether.

Now, how many poor innocent ladies do you think

apply to Mrs.—— for that domestic treasure?—poor women who have large families and little means: who can only afford to keep one servant; and perhaps, ever since they were first married, have been wanting that clean, willing, country girl who will cook the dinner and nurse the children, and all well for nine pounds a year, and have never found her. How many? I should not like to say.

Do you think there ever was such a “Mary”?

Never.

Apply to the advertiser. You may write to her, or go and see her. If the latter, she will smile affably, and tell you—what she will tell you in a letter, if you write to her—that it is most unfortunate, because somebody else has just engaged that particular “Mary.” On payment, however, of a fee of half a crown, your name may be placed on the books of the Agency, and you will, doubtless—say in a week or two—be rewarded by having just such another phoenix of domestic servants transferred to your own kitchen.

Transparent traps to catch half-crowns. The sun shines through ruses so clumsy. Very likely. But people won't see it. A proportion of the applicants—large enough to make the game at least remunerative—pay their half-crown in the certain assurance of getting a Mary exactly like the one who was so unfortunately ravished from their grasp. Of course, they never got her. Then the fool-trap is baited afresh.

Now, multiply Mrs.——'s humble half-crown by eight. That makes a sovereign. The fee is one sovereign. Divide the number of applicants by any numeral you think will give you the truth as the result

of this sum in simple division, and you will know how much Mr.—, who flies at higher game, gets by his profession of not finding places for secretaries, clerks, ushers, and the rest, who want employment in this great city; always remembering that his most frequent quarry is the broken man who knows neither trade nor profession, but must have a gentlemanlike occupation: men who, like young Frank Melliship, are ruined; but who, unlike him, have no friend. Hundreds of these men have given a sovereign out of their last two or three to the Agent, and received in return—0.

To find these men who want work and can't get it, who deserve well—yet, asking bread, receive stones: here is a field for charity!

Now let us return to Frank Melliship.

I have not called him the hero of my story, because he has done nothing heroic—because he seems to stand in the way of his own success; and with that noble object he has in view, to be wasting precious time only to earn an indifferent living.

Why does he not apply to John Heathcote? Why will he not be helped by his superlatively rich cousin, Dick Mortiboy?

I will tell you why, for I want to paint him as he was. It was a point of pride: determination to show his independence of all those who, as he thought, ought to have saved his father from ruin, madness, and death.

“I will do without them. The world is wide. Energy overcomes all difficulties. ‘Labor omnia vincit.’”

Boys' copybook rubbish. It does not. “RES omnia vincit.” It is capital that conquers all things, from a kingdom up to a woman.

"To London and to Art." He had come to town something of an enthusiast. Where Art left him, we have seen. Was this the fault of Art? No.

He wanted long education and years of patient toil to paint even moderately well. This he did not know, and nobody but Kate had ever told him so.

Let us do him justice. He never thought himself a genius; but he believed in his energy, in his determination to succeed, and thought some way would be found by himself. He did not want to be shown the way, or to be helped by any friend of his prosperous days. His desire to be independent, and work his own way, was a sort of vanity; but it is not uncommon. I know a rich man who would rather *earn* a single guinea than that the goddess of Good Luck should shower a hundred into his pocket from the clouds. This was Frank's state of mind too.

He had made an entry of the address of the Agency in his pocket-book, and called the waiter to him; when the thought flashed across his mind that he had forgotten, when he ordered his breakfast, the emptiness of his pocket. He explained his predicament to the waiter, and offered to leave his watch with the proprietor. It was, he said, the only thing of value he had about him, except the guard.

The man saw he was a gentleman, and begged him not to trouble about the matter, but pay him any day when he was passing.

"It is the easiest thing in the world," thought Frank, "for a man who always has had money in his pocket, to walk into a shop and quite forget he has none."

He came to a pawnbroker's, and he thought he had better pawn his watch and chain at once. He must have some money.

There was a shop window full of plate and jewellery; in a side-street was an open door-way, revealing a row of little doors. Frank guessed what these cabinets were, but he was some few minutes before he could make up his mind to go in. He looked at the costly things in the window—he walked past the doorway; at last, looking cautiously up the street and down the street, as if he were about to commit a burglary, and was afraid of the policeman who might be round the corner, he plunged into one of the little boxes, falling over an old woman who was haggling with the shopman for sixpence more than she had got last time on a pair of sheets.

Frank flushed in his confusion, apologized, and tried the next cabinet. This was empty; and here, trying to look as if he had often done it before, he put down his watch and chain on the counter with the grace of a roué, and waited his turn.

The man examined his watch, asked if it was in going order, weighed his chain, and smiled as he leered at him through his spectacles.

Frank, despite his efforts, looked so completely innocent.

“How much?”

Frank hesitated before he answered.

“How much will you lend me?”

“Tell me how much you want?”

“Well, a fiver.”

“All right. These aint been in before, young gentleman.”

"How do you know?" asked Frank, blushing, and very much ashamed of the transaction he was engaged in.

"We've got a private mark in the trade we put on everything that comes in," said the man; and Frank believed him.

He began to write out the ticket.

"What name?"

"Must I give it?"

"Not unless you like. Any name 'll do. Mr. Smith, of Piccadilly, it generally is. Will that do?"

Frank nodded.

"Got fourpence? For the ticket, you know."

The poor boy blushed scarlet.

"All right, my lad: there you are. Four"—he dashed down the sovereigns—"nineteen, eight."

Frank put the money and the ticket in his pocket, and went back to pay for his breakfast.

Then he made his way to the Agency.

The proprietor had not come, but his clerk told Frank he had a very good list of appointments "suitable for any gentleman to take."

Frank was very glad to hear this, and asked for some particulars about the secretaryship advertised.

"Our fee for entering a name is a sovereign—over a hundred and fifty a year—half a sovereign under it. This secretaryship is three hundred. Fine Arts Company (Limited). The governor's in it, and it'll soon be got up."

To the credit of Frank Melliship's common sense, I record the fact that he did not pay the sovereign, but asked the fellow what they meant by their advertisement. He had a copy of it in his book, and he read it out.

The clerk was evidently of an irritable temperament. Perhaps they often had a row in the office. He was rude to Frank. He turned on his heel, and left the counter, with the words—

“P’raps you know gentlemen as hasn’t got a sovereign. Coming here, wasting out time and kicking up a row!”

The being was too contemptible to thrash, but his remark opened Frank’s eyes to the position of things. That such a little cad dared insult him!

He turned into a bye-street, and looked for a quiet corner where he could sit down and curse fate. There was none. So he cursed fate as he walked along.

After walking for half an hour or so, he began to pull himself together.

“Swearing will not help, at any rate. Something must be done, and that soon. I believe I am getting hungry again. What a misfortune to have such a twist. Poverty may be invigorating, but it’s unpleasant. I don’t think I’m strong enough to take the medicine. As for taking money from Dick, that, of course, is out of the question.”

He was walking along a West-end street, and saw at a door a brass plate, with “University and Scholastic Agency” upon it.

“Let us try the schools. Perhaps they won’t ask for a sovereign,” he said, and went in.

They did not. The agent, a man of extremely affable and polished manners, invited Frank to sit down, and asked him what he could do.

“Tell me candidly. I’ve got plenty of places.”

“I’ve taken a Poll degree at Cambridge. I know very little Latin or Greek, and no mathematics.”

"Bad," said the agent. "Any French?"

"Oh, French—of course. And—and I can paint and draw."

"A good cricketer? Anything of an oar?"

"Yes—rowed five in the first college boat. Played in the college eleven."

"My dear sir, a public school will be delighted to have you. They don't care, you see, about their junior masters being great scholars, because they have found out that any one can teach the boys their Delectus. But they do want athletics. You'd be worth your weight in gold to a head master. Sit down at that table, and put down all you can do. First-class Poll, I think you said."

"No—last. I just scraped through."

"Well, never mind. Sit down and write."

"So"—he read over Frank's modest list of accomplishments—"I will find—it is now July the 10th—before the vacations are over, a really good opening for you."

"But I've had no experience in teaching."

"What does that matter? Look at your experience in the field and on the river. Give me your address."

"I must find one first. I am—I am looking for lodgings; but I will send it you as soon as possible."

He came out of the office with a lightened heart. Something would be got: something unpleasant, naturally—because the order of things allots all unpleasant things to poor men—but still, the means of life. In a few minutes he was perfectly happy in his new prospects—just as a drowning man is happy to find a plank even if he is in mid-ocean, with no ship in sight.

Then, a sudden reflection dashed his pleasure. He was to have his new post when the summer vacation was over. How was he to live till then? If on his wardrobe, there would be no possibility of presenting a respectable exterior; and his watch and chain would not go very far.

He put his hand into his empty pocket, and pulled out the card which he had taken from the Jewish gentleman the night before.

"By Jove! it's Bighead's card. I'll go and see him."

It bore the name of Mr. Emmanuel Leweson, and an address in Brunswick Square.

Thither Frank bent his steps, tired and fagged with the long walking about he had had. A cab, of course, was not to be thought of.

He sent in his card—Mr. Leweson was at home—and in a few minutes he found himself again in the presence of his acquaintance of the evening before.

Mr. Leweson looked more big-headed than ever, sitting over a late breakfast—it was half-past twelve—in a light dressing-gown. He had been breakfasting luxuriously. The table was covered with fruit and flowers. He was drinking Rhine wine from a long flask.

"Come in, Mr. Melliship—since that is your name. I am glad to see you—very glad. Take a glass of wine, and sit down. And now," he said, finishing his breakfast, and lighting a cigar, "let us talk business. Tell me as much as you like about yourself, Mr. Melliship. The more the better."

Frank told him as much as he thought advisable.

"So—no money; expensive tastes; habits of a gen-

tleman; no special knowledge; art and music. Now, Mr. Melliship, do you know what I am?"

"No; something theatrical, I should say."

"That is because I wear a velvet coat, and breakfast off fruit and Rhine wine, I suppose? No. You are not far wrong, however. I am a musical composer by nature; the owner and manager of a London music hall by will of a malignant fate. Yes, young man—in me you see the manager of the North London Palace of Amusements."

He waved his hand as he spoke, as if deprecating the other's contempt.

"I know, I know. They sing, 'Rollicking Rams' and 'Champagne Charlie'—not a bad air, that last—and we are altogether a degraded and degrading place. But we must pay, dear sir, we must pay. I do more than the rest of them, because I always try to get something good. For instance, I've got you."

"I don't know that you have," said Frank, laughing. The big-headed man amused him tremendously.

"You will come and sing three songs every evening—allowing yourself to be encored for one only, because time is precious. You will thus gain confidence, as well as three guineas a week. I intend to push you, and we shall have you on the boards of the Royal Italian before many years. Then you will remember with gratitude that I brought you out."

"Do I understand you to offer me—"

"Do you want pen, ink and paper? Have I not said it? Ask the people at the music hall if Leweson's word is not as good as any other man's bond. Will you accept?"

"Don't ask me to sing under my own name."

"Sing in any name you like—only sing for me."

"Very well, then."

Mr. Leweson held out his hand, and shook Frank's by way of ratifying the bargain.

"And now come with me," he said, "and we will pay a visit to the Palace. A poor place, after all; but the people go there, the idiotic, stupid people. Would you believe that I brought out the music of my opera there, and they hissed it? Then I engaged the Inexpressible Jones, placarded all London, gave them, 'Rollicking Rams' and the rest of it, and the people all came back again. Dolts, asses, idiots, loonatics!"

He banged his head with his fist at every epithet, and then put on his hat—an enormous brigand's hat—with a scowl of revenge and hatred. Then he burst out laughing, and led the way out.

They took a Hansom from the stand.

"How I wish you could do trapeze business," said Mr. Leweson. "I suppose you can't, by any chance?"

"No—I'm afraid not."

"You could act so well with Giulia. The poor girl has only got her father and little Joe to fall back on. It would tell immensely if we could put you in. The talented Silvani family. Signor Pietro Silvani, Signor Francesco, and the Divine Giulia. A brilliant idea just occurred to me—a combination of three. The Signor at the bottom, with rings instead of a bar; you on his shoulders; Giulia on yours. Giulia is left at the first trapeze; you at the second; the undaunted head of the family goes on to the last. Bless you, Giulia wouldn't be afraid! She's afraid of nothing, that girl. But there, if you can't do it, you can't, of course. After all, it might spoil your career as

a tenor. Don't let us think of it. Where do you live?"

Frank turned red.

"I'm looking for lodgings now."

"Oh! Well, then, the best thing I can do is to send you to Mrs. Skimp's. She's cheap, and tolerably good. Here we are, sir, at the Palace, where every evening the British public may receive, at the ridiculous price of one shilling, the highest form of amusement compatible with their state of civilization. Here's the stage door. That is your door. I am busy to-day, and cannot give you any more time. Take my card, and show it to Mrs. Skimp. That will do for an introduction; and for the present, at least, you can stay there. And come round here to-morrow at one. Good-bye. Take care of your throat."

CHAPTER IV.

After their dinner together at Dick Mortiboy's hotel, before he bade his cousin good-night, Frank promised to breakfast with him the next day.

The morning came. Breakfast was on the table, Dick was waiting; but no Frank arrived. So as young Ready-money—as the Market Basing people began to call him—never in his life had stood on much ceremony of any kind, he ate a very substantial breakfast without his guest; felt a little vexed that the cutlets were cold: wondered where Frank was, and why he did not come; and, finally, strolled into the smoking-room, and lighted his cigar.

He had scarcely drawn a dozen whiffs of smoke, when the waiter brought up a card on a silver tray.

"By Jove! here he is; but breakfast's done with." And without looking at the card, he said, "Show the gentleman up, and order some more breakfast."

But the card was not Frank's. It bore the name of Alcide Lafleur.

Let me say a word about Dick Mortiboy's partner.

All this time, what has Alcide Lafleur been doing? What of the System, the infallible method of breaking banks, to follow up which was the primary object of the partners' return to the old country? Dick, not unmindful of his pledge, very shortly after his accession to fortune, made over to Lafleur the five thousand he had promised him. He did not consider himself so bound by the terms of that old oath of his, which we have recorded, as to make an immediate division of his property into two halves, and to give Lafleur one; but he did consider himself bound, in a general way, to abide by him till their partnership was dissolved by mutual consent. Meantime, Lafleur seemed in no hurry to test his System: he stayed in London, drawing on Dick occasionally for small sums, and keeping the five thousand intact for the Hombourg expedition. Certain small dabblings he made at *écarté*, hazard, loo, and such games of chance as were to be found in London circles, just to keep his hand in; but his main business was to pore over his calculations, day after day, in order to reduce his method to a mathematical certainty. Lafleur, a cool, clear-headed man, studied, as soon as he found it likely to help him, the Science of Probabilities. It helped him to the extent of furnishing him with an inexhaustible supply of figures and calculations; and it strengthened,

so far as he could see, the chances of the System he had perfected.

His system was to him what his model is to an inventor. It had grown up with years of steady play and unsteady fortunes. The idea of it came into his head when Dick and he were engaged in blockade running, and used to while away their leisure hours in a little game on the after-deck, while the crew were having their little games in the forecastle. It took root and grew slowly, taking form as it grew, till, to the inventor's eyes, it seemed absolutely perfect and consistent. No run of luck, he thought, would stand against it. With a capital of £5,000, so as to meet the very worst contingencies, it was so certain to win, that he could defy fortune. He had made one or two little ventures with it in America, before they came over, with perfect success; and then, having that kind of love for it which makes a man shrink from using his invention till the day of experiment comes, he postponed considerable operations till he could use it at the Hombourg tables. He was like an aëronaut with a new machine. He looked at it, examined it, admired it, ornamented it, boasted of it, but put off the day of its trial, which would be either his death or his glory. Dick provided him with money for his personal expenditure, so that the five thousand remained intact. For himself, Lafleur wanted comparatively little. He was not a man of expensive tastes. He drank, but apparently without great enjoyment, and never so as to produce any effect on his head. He smoked, but in great moderation, and only light cigarettes. He loved to dress well—but this was necessary for a gentleman in his line of life. And he

liked to have the reputation of doing certain things well—with which object, he might have been seen practising with a pistol in a gallery, or fencing with a professional: this also with a view to certain contingencies.

He was so perfectly confident of his System—so thoroughly reliant on its power of breaking any bank ever started, however rich—that he did not, at this time, regard his old partner's altered position with either envy or distrust. Dick had kept his word by him honestly, as he always did—Dick's word being quite as good as any other man's oath. The money which he wanted for the System, on the possession of which he based all his calculations, was in his hands. So far, all was well. With this capital, he asked no more. Lafleur, at this time, was no vulgar and greedy adventurer, eager to get money anyhow. From this he was saved by belief in his System. All he wanted was the means of applying it. To get the means he was, of course, prepared—as we have already seen—to do anything, everything. Having the means, he desired only to bring his calculations to practical uses, and, after fleecing the bankers in a perfectly legitimate way, to settle down somewhere or other—say in Paris. He had not the delight in roving and wild scenes that his partner had. No coward, he shrank from that kind of life where personal conflicts are common. This dislike to rough-and-tumble fights—common enough among Frenchmen, was atoned for by his perfect readiness to fight with pistols or sword. Dick was ready, on the other hand, with either fist or weapon. The partnership between them had been at all times true, but at no time cordial—at least, on Lafleur's

part. He admired the man who feared nothing and braved everything. He respected his pluck, his determination, his wilfulness, the way in which he forced his own way on people. What he disliked was a certain *brutalité* in his partner—a coarseness, he thought, of fibre—a want of delicacy in taste. He liked to dress carefully. Dick dressed anyhow—with a certain splendour when in funds. Lafleur liked to live fastidiously. Dick cared little what he ate and drank, provided the meat was in plenty, and the liquor strong, and in plenty too. A great beefsteak, and a pot of foaming stout—these represented to Lafleur his partner's tastes, to which he was himself so immensely superior. Dick, on the other hand, could not but feel some pity—a little mingled with contempt—for a man so slightly built, so singularly useless in a row. At the same time, he admired his dexterity at all games of chance, and the calm way in which he met the strokes of fortune.

A well-matched pair, so far as each supplemented certain deficiencies in the other: an ill-matched pair, because they had no kind of sympathy with each other: a partnership of a brace of penniless adventurers, determined to live on the world as best they might: a society which held together by the bonds of habit of long use, and the fact that each entirely trusted in the honesty of his companion—Dick because he was loyal, Lafleur because he was sagacious.

But now there was a feeling growing up in both men's minds that the partnership was to come to an end, and each be free to go his own way. How the separation was to take place, which of the two was to introduce the subject, neither knew. Dick, for his part

—resolved Lafleur should no longer be associated with him in the new life he was to lead—was prepared to make almost any sacrifice to break off the connection. Lafleur, on the other hand, was equally ready to go, on no conditions whatever. He had the System, and the capital to start with.

They met, therefore, when Dick went up to town, on a new footing. Men have been divided into rooks and pigeons—borrowers and lenders—sharks, and prey for sharks. But there is a third and a very important class: the class of those who defend their own. As strong as the beasts and birds of prey, they are braver, because they are backed up by law and public opinion. It was to this class that Dick Mortiboy belonged now: Lafleur still to the camp which he had deserted. It is true that Dick half regretted the old days of excitement and peril, when they talked only to contrive new dodges, and went about to execute them. What he really missed, and would have recalled, was the wild freedom of the old life, not its antagonism to society. Conventionality, not mankind, was his enemy. This he hated, and it weighed upon him like a thick blanket on a summer's night.

Lafleur came into the room. Dick held out his hand.

His partner sat down. With the cold smile that always played about his pale face, he asked—

“When are we going to Hombourg?”

“I don't know. I don't think I shall go at all.”

“You were half engaged to go with me,” said Lafleur, reproachfully. “But, of course, if you cannot come— Is your cousin with you still?”

“No. I am waiting for him. You have been trying the System again?”

"Dick, it is perfect." His face had a pallid enthusiasm when he spoke of his invention. "I have studied it so long that I know every combination the chances can take. I must win. I cannot help it. I am almost sorry I had so much money from you, because I really shall not want it all. My capital is too big."

"Still—still— You know, luck may go so as no mortal capital ever held can stand against it. Remember that night when we were cleaned out at St. Louis."

"It may—of course it may. But it never does. At whist, you *may* hold thirteen trumps, if you are dealing. But who ever does? No man in his senses ever contemplates a hand like that. The night at St. Louis was a bad one, I admit. It was before my System was completed, though, or else we should— No—no, we had no capital then. But I've counted every reasonable combination, Dick, everything I ever *saw* happen—and you'll admit that I've seen a good deal—I've played countless games on paper, and I've always won. Come over with me, and see me break the banks, one after the other. By heaven, Dick, I shall be far richer than you!"

"I should like to go. But, no—I think I had better not leave my own place just now. But there, you don't understand the position of things."

"I understand," said Lafleur, "that the position of Mr. Dick Mortiboy is considerably altered for the better. I suppose—But, Dick, really I did not think you would have been so quick in throwing over old friends."

"I have thrown over no old friends. Did I not

honestly redeem my word, and hand you the capital you asked for?"

"You did. That is not quite all, though. Did we not discuss the System all the way across the Atlantic? Were you not as keen as I about it? Who but you thought of coming to England? Why did we come? To get out of your father this very sum—not to hand over to me, Dick, but to enable us to go away together, and break the banks in our old partnership. And now, when all is gained, you care nothing about it. Is it what I expected from you, Dick? I counted on your seeing my victories as much as on making them."

This was true. He wanted Dick's admiration and praise. He wanted to feel a man's envy.

"Because, you see," answered his partner, "a good deal more is gained than we bargained for. I no longer care to gamble. What does it mean if you care nothing about winning or losing? Upon my word, Lafleur, I would almost as soon, if it were not for the habit of the thing, dance a waltz without any music as play at cards without caring to win. Life when you're rich is quite a different sort of thing to what we experienced in the old days. It's slower, to begin with. You find that everybody is your friend, in the second place. Then you discover that instead of looking about to do good to yourself, you've got to fuss and worry about doing good to other people."

"Fancy Dick Mortiboy doing good to anybody!"

"Queer, isn't it? But true. They tell me I'm doing good, so I suppose I am. Then, after all, you can't eat and drink more than a certain amount. You don't want to have more than a dogcart and a riding-

horse. You can't be always giving dinners and things. What are you to do with your money? You've always got the missionaries left, to be sure; but you're an ass if you give them anything."

"By Jove—I should think so, indeed!" said Lafleur.

"Then what are you to do with yourself and your money? I make a few bets, but I don't care much about it. I play a game of billiards, but it doesn't matter whether I win or lose. Life's lost its excitements, Lafleur. The old days are gone."

"In England, you can always go on the turf. There is plenty of money to be lost there."

"I never cared much about horse-races, unless I was riding in them myself. I daresay I shall go on the turf, though, for a little excitement. I don't know what I shall do, Lafleur. When life becomes insupportable, I shall go across the water again, I think, and stay till I am tired of that, and want a change. But as for cards—why, what excitement is equal to that of playing for your very dinner, as we have done before now? How can one get up any pleasure in a game when it does not really signify how it ends?"

"You always think of the end. But think of the play, Dick. Think of working out your own plan, and going down with it, and fleecing everybody—eh? Is there no excitement there?"

"There would be if I wanted the money. Not now. I never cared to win from those who couldn't afford to lose, Lafleur."

"I know. You were always soft-hearted, Dick. Now, if a man plays with me, I play to win. I've got no more feeling, Dick, over cards than the green table itself."

The candour of this admission of Lafleur's was equalled by its truth.

Dick sighed, and leaned his head upon his hand.

"By Jove, they were good times, some of them. Do you remember that very day, after the St. Louis cleaning out, how we woke up in the morning without a cent between us?"

Lafleur nodded. Some reminiscences of Dick's were unpleasant. But he seemed warming back to his old tone, and Lafleur wanted to take him over to Hombourg with him.

"You went to the billiard-rooms. I went to the Monty Saloon. And when we met again in the evening we had got six hundred dollars. That was the day when I fought the Peruvian. It was a near thing. I'll never fight a duel blind-folded again. I thought I heard his steps, and I let fly. He had it in the right arm—broke the bone. Then he fired with the left hand—being a blood-thirsty rascal—and hit Cæsar, the black waiter, in the calf. I remember how we laughed. Then we went on to Cairo. Upon my word, Lafleur, when I think of those days, my blood boils. All fair play, too. Every man trying to cheat his neighbour. Good, honest gambling, with a bowie knife ready at your neck."

"All fair play," echoed Lafleur, with the faintest smile on his lips.

"It was better than the blockade running, after all; though there were some very pretty days in that. It was better than—I say, after all, don't you think the best moment of our lives was when we stood on board the little schooner, dripping wet, after our swim from the reef of Palmiste?"

At another time, Lafleur would have resented this recollection of an extremely disagreeable episode in his life. Now he laughed.

"Yes," he said, "perhaps it was a moment of relief, after a *mauvais quart d'heure*. It was then that we swore our partnership."

"It was," said Dick. "We've kept to our terms ever since. Lafleur, the time has come for our separation. I can no longer lead the old life. All that is done with. We are adventurers no more. I have my fortune; you possess your capital and—your System."

"I shall soon be as rich as you with it," said Lafleur, confidently.

"We are partners no longer, then? It is dissolved, Lafleur. I've got the best of it; but don't say Dick Mortiboy ever turned his back upon a friend. If you have not money enough, let me know. Take more."

"I have plenty. I cannot fail. It is impossible. But I want you to come to Hombourg with me. See me succeed, Dick—see me triumph with my System. That is all I ask."

"I will see," said Dick. "I will not promise to go with you. Twelve years, Lafleur, we have fought our battles side by side. I remember the words of my oath to you as well as if I spoke them yesterday;—'If I can help you, I will help you. If I have any luck, you shall have half. If I have any money, you shall have half.' Was it not so? Yet you have only had five thousand pounds of all my money. It is because my father's money is not mine, really. I only hold it. I have it for certain purposes—I hardly know what yet. I could not keep my word in its literal sense."

"Dick, I don't ask you," said Lafleur. "I have told you I am satisfied."

"Then you give me back my word?" said Dick.

"I solemnly give it back, Dick," was the reply.

He held out his hand, which Dick grasped. He heaved a great sigh. Their partnership was dissolved. His oath had been heavy upon him, for Dick's word was sacred—the only sacred thing he knew. The vast fortune into which he had so unexpectedly fallen, with all its duties and responsibilities, which Dick was already beginning to realise, was so complicated an affair, that, in the most perfect honesty, he could not literally fulfil his promise. He did the next best thing. He gave Lafleur all he asked for. He was prepared to give him as much again—three times as much, if necessary. But he was glad to get back his word—returned to him like a paid cheque, or a duly honoured bill.

Is it not clear that Dick is progressing in civilisation? He has recognised the voice of public opinion. He has remarked that the force of circumstances compels him, whether he will or no, to lead an outwardly decorous life. He has recognised, dimly as yet, that this vast property cannot be made ducks and drakes of, flung away, spent recklessly, as he fondly promised himself when he undeceived his father. He sees that it is like the root-work of some great trees, spreading out branches in all directions, small and great branches: to tear up and destroy them would be to change the fortunes of thousands, to ruin, to revolutionise, to devastate.

Things must be as they are. He is now free: he has got back his word, and is clear of Lafleur.

This is a great gain.

There is still, however, one link which holds him with the past.

It is———POLLY!

CHAPTER V.

MRS. SKIMP'S. Her establishment is in Granville Square, Islington—one of those pleasant places where fashion and aristocracy have never penetrated to corrupt the simplicity of the natives. Mrs. Skimp's is two houses converted into one by knocking a door through the partition wall on each floor. Everybody in the neighbourhood knows it, for Mrs. Skimp has been there a good many years. Frank asked the way to Granville Square at a baker's shop: it happened to be Mrs. Skimp's baker.

"This little b'y's just going there, sir," the woman behind the counter said, very civilly. "He will show you the way. What number might you want, sir?"

"Thirty-three."

"Thirty-three and thirty-four. Mrs. Skimp's, sir," said the woman, her face brightening up at the prospect of three extra loaves a-week being wanted. "That's the house the little b'y's going to."

Frank followed the boy with his load of bread.

In three minutes they were in the square. It was an oblong really, and not so wide as Regent's Quadrant; and it had a badly kept strip of garden in the middle. The houses were plastered over; and with two or three exceptions, wanted a coat of paint as

badly as houses could. Mrs. Skimp's was an exception. It was a house of three storeys, and attics in the roof. Over the doors were lamps slightly projecting from the pane of glass that lets light into the hall; and on these in huge gilt figures, 33 and 34 blazed in the sun. They were repeated again on the door.

The boy pulled the area bell, and pointed to the knocker and then to Frank, when a dirty servant came out at the basement door to take in the bread.

Frank's knock remained a minute unanswered: but he saw the lace curtains of the window move, and caught sight of a face—apparently a young lady's—peeping at him over the blind.

Then the servant came and showed him into a room, evidently the dining-room.

Here he had to wait while Mrs. Skimp and her daughter "put themselves to rights."

Presently they came in together. Mrs. Skimp was tall, and of rather pleasing appearance. Her daughter was short and stout, and decidedly uninteresting.

"She takes after my lamented husband, the late Mr. Skimp," her mother often said. "She is quite unlike my family."

They both bowed very cordially to Frank. He bowed in return.

"I desire to—to—"

"Board and reside with a private family of good position. I quite understand, sir. Our circle is small and select. Terms from twenty-two-and-six, according to the room. Was it the *Telegraph* or the *Times*, sir?" asked this voluble personage.

"Neither, madam," said Frank. "Mr. Leweson recommended me to see you on the subject."

"Very kind, indeed, of Mr. Leweson. We know him quite well, my dear—do we not? A very agreeable gentleman, and quite the *artiste*. Such ears!"

Frank looked at her in surprise. He thought, at first, she alluded to the size of them, which was quite a natural, if not a polite thing, to say; but no, it was a tribute to his musical genius.

Mrs. Skimp, as the reader has already discovered, kept a cheap boarding-house. Like all of her profession, she persisted in calling it "a private family and a select circle."

She read Frank's name on Mr. Leweson's card, and showed him the bed-rooms then at her disposal, expatiating in glowing terms on the advantages of living in such a neighbourhood as Granville Square—and particularly with such a family as Mrs. Skimp's.

"We have the key of the square, for the use of the boarders, sir," she said.

Frank could not help contrasting in his own mind, the key of the square offered by Mrs. Skimp, with the key of the street so lately in his possession.

There certainly is some difference between the two.

His interview with Mrs. Skimp was short and satisfactory. Anybody who came with Mr. Leweson's recommendation was received by her with great pleasure. She was about forty-five years of age, a widow with one daughter, Clara. She was born to become fat and comfortable; but nature's intentions were so far frustrated by the hard conditions of life that, while becoming fat, she by no means looked comfortable, having an air of anxiety which came from an external effort to bring her bills within the compass of her income. She was short-winded, because the stairs, up

and down which she ran all day long, had made her so. She held her hand upon her heart, not because she suffered from any palpitation, but from a habit she had contracted after her husband's death. It indicated resignation and sorrow. Her hair was already streaked with grey. Her eyes were sharp; but her mouth was soft. That meant that she would have been kind-hearted, had it not been her lot to contend with people who seemed all bent upon cheating her.

She kept a cheap boarding-house. It was a place where you received your dinner, breakfast, and bedroom for the modest sum of twenty-five shillings a week—with the usual extras, Mrs. Skimp would say, explaining that the gentlemen paid for their own liquor, of which she always kept the very best that could be got for money. They also paid extra for washing. She took Frank over the house.

"This," she said, "is the dining-room."

It was a room with two pieces of furniture in it, a table and a sideboard. The latter, a veneered piece of workmanship, in an advanced state of decay, was covered with tumblers, glasses, and bottles. Each bottle had a card tied round it, with somebody's name on it. Round the red earthenware water-bottle was tied a huge placard, on which was written, in characters an inch long, "Mr. Eddrup." Mrs. Skimp took it off with an air of annoyance, and tore it up. A dozen chairs were ranged round the walls of the apartment. There was very little besides: no pictures; dirty muslin curtains; no carpet. It was the front room, and looked out into the square, where half a dozen brown trees were making a miserable pretence of sum-

mer, and the children were tumbling over each other on the pavement outside the rails.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Skimp, "it is a privilege of my boarders to go into the garden, if they like, and smoke their pipes there. And very beautiful it is, on a fine evening, when the flowers are out, I do assure you. Now, let me show you the billiard-room, sir."

At the back of the dining-room was a billiard table. Old it was certainly; the baize torn and patched, and torn again; the cushions dull and lumpy; the balls untrue from their long battering; the cues mostly without their tops;—but still a billiard table: undeniably, a billiard table.

"It is an extra, of course," said Mrs. Skimp, with pride. "We charge a shilling a-week for the privilege of coming into this room. Some of the gentlemen"—this with a deprecatory simper—"spend their Sunday mornings here instead of at church. But perhaps, sir, you've been better brought up."

She led the way to the drawing-room, ornamented with a round table in the middle, curtains, and two or three battered easy-chairs. In them were seated two men, smoking pipes. They looked up as Frank came in, but did not offer to remove their pipes from their mouths.

"This is the drawing-room, where the boarders sit after dinner, and play cards if they like, or amuse themselves," she whispered. "That is Cap'en Bowker, him with the red beard; and the other is Cap'en Hamilton, him with the moustache—both boarders, sir."

Frank gave half a look at them, and followed his guide to the bed-room. He got a small room—two of them had been made out of a big room by putting up

a partition, and taking half the window—arranged to bring his portmanteau round at once, and went away.

"We dine at half-past five, Mr. Melliship—punctual. I do hope you won't keep us waiting, because the gentlemen use such dreadful language if the meat is overdone."

"I'll be punctual, Mrs. Skimp," said Frank, as he trudged off to his old lodgings, and brought away his luggage.

Then he strolled about the delightful neighbourhood of Islington—new to him—making acquaintance with the most remarkable monuments of the place; and then he found it was five o'clock, and he turned homewards to be in time for dinner.

"Not expected to dress at Skimp's, I suppose," he said.

The bell rang as he opened the dining-room door. The room was filled by about a dozen men of all ages. They greeted Frank with the stare of rude inquiry by which men of a certain class welcome a new comer.

"Swell down on his luck," murmured Captain Hamilton to the lad—a King's College medical student—who stood by him, leaning half out of window.

At the moment, a red-cheeked and bare-armed servant-maid brought in the dinner. She was followed by Mrs. Skimp, who had brushed her hair, and put on a clean cap for dinner, and now assumed the head of the table, rapping with the handle of her carving knife to summon her boarders.

They took their seats.

"You must take the bottom seat, Mr. Melliship," said the hostess, gracefully pointing with a fork. "No,

not the end—that's Mr. Eddrup's. That's right: next to Cap'en Bowker. Jane, take the cover off."

Just then there glided into the room an old gentleman, dressed in black coat and gray trousers. He took his place at the end of the table. Nobody took the least notice of him—except Captain Bowker, who asked him, in a whisper, if he was better. Mr. Eddrup shook his head, and poured out a glass of water. This was a sort of signal; for there is no better opportunity of displaying wit than when you are waiting to be served, and no safer a method than that of chaffing an old man.

The medical student began. How delightful is the flow of spirits, unchecked by the ordinary restrictions of politeness, which distinguishes a certain class of medical students!

He burst into a horse laugh, and pointed at Mr. Eddrup.

"Ha, ha!—Ho, ho! There he goes again. Must cool his coppers."

"Where did you get tight last night, Mr. Eddrup?" cried Captain Hamilton, whom Frank set down at once as a leg of the most unmitigated description. He was one of those shady, suburban-race men who hang about at small meetings, living heaven knows how. At present, he was three or four weeks in debt at Skimp's, and was meditating flight, with the partial sacrifice of his wardrobe.

"I think I saw him at the Alhambra about eleven," said another, a City clerk. "He was winking at the ballet girls."

"Oh, Mr. Eddrup!—Oh, bad man!" was groaned all round the table; and then everybody laughed.

Mr. Eddrup took not the smallest notice of anybody, calmly sitting with his eyes fixed before him. The immobility of his features was very remarkable. He took no notice at all, either by look or gesture. He was a small, thin man, with a broad, high brow. His hair, which had not fallen off, and was still thick, lay in long, white masses—much longer than young men wear it—and gave him a singular, out-of-the-way appearance, not easily forgotten. But his face attracted Frank at once. It had a quite inexpressible charm of sweetness. The cheeks were pinched in; round the eyes were crows'-feet; the lips were thin; but in the sad smile that lived upon his mouth you could read the presence of some spirit of content which made the foolish gibes of the rest fall upon him unregarded. Who was he? Why did he live at Skimp's? Frank caught himself looking at him during the dinner with ever-increasing wonder. It must be poverty;—perhaps it was avarice. His clothes were worn and threadbare. He drank nothing but water with his dinner.

The dinner consisted of an enormous leg of mutton—the biggest ever seen, probably, and, Frank thought, perhaps the stringiest. He found that you could have beer, or even wine—only that luxury was hardly known at Mrs. Skimp's dinner table—by ordering it of the red-armed attendant. During the intervals of feeding, a running horse-play of wit went on at Mr. Eddrup's expense. His appetite was commented on—his personal appearance and habits. Stories, not the most delicately chosen, were told about his antecedents. To all this Mr. Eddrup was entirely callous. Captain Hamilton greatly distinguished himself in this

feast of reason by a persistent disregard of a woman's presence, and a steady accumulation of insinuations against the morals of the old gentleman, which did him infinite credit.

"Does this sort of thing go on every evening?" asked Frank of his neighbour, Captain Bowker, the only one who took no part in the conversation.

"Every morning and every evening. Breakfast and dinner. At two bells and the dog watch," replied Captain Bowker.

Frank hardly understood the last allusion, but let it pass.

Dinner concluded as it had begun, without the ceremony of grace, and the guests rose one by one, and strolled into the billiard-room.

Captain Hamilton and the three at the end of the table alone remained. He advanced to Frank with an easy grace, and tendered him his card.

"Let us know each other," he said, "as we are for the moment in the same hole."

Frank took the card: "Captain Hamilton." No regiment upon it.

"Ceylon Rifles," said the Captain.

"My name is Melliship," said Frank. He would not have another alias.

"Come and join our pool, Mr. Melliship."

"No, thank you. I never play at billiards, except—that is, I never do play."

"Come and look on. You can bet on the game, and smoke."

"I never bet, thank you," said Frank, coldly.

"Well, what do you do, then?" asked the Captain, rudely.

"What the devil, sir, is that to you?"

The blood rushed through Frank's veins again. He was getting combative against this thinly-disguised rook.

Captain Hamilton turned on his heel, and went away. A minute or two afterwards the click of the balls was heard, and an approving laugh at some anecdote of the gallant officer's—probably an account, from his own point of view, of his late interview with Frank.

Mr. Eddrup still sat at the end of the table—Captain Bowker beside him. They rose together as soon as the room was cleared.

"Young man," said Captain Bowker, "I am glad to hear that you don't bet—likewise that you don't play billiards. Come upstairs, and have a pipe in the drawing-room with me and Mr. Eddrup. We use this room pretty much to ourselves," said Captain Bowker, taking an easy-chair. "The others prefer the billiard-room. They go out, too, a good deal in the evenings. That's a great thing at Skimp's. A man *is* left alone if he likes."

The speaker was a man of about fifty-five or so—weather-beaten, rugged. He had fair hair and blue eyes, and had a habit of looking straight ahead at nothing, which comes of a dreamy nature. He was an old "ship captain"—*i.e.*, a merchant-service skipper.

It is a singular thing about skippers, that ashore they are all uniformly the most gentle, tractable creatures that walk about. They drink sometimes, which is their only vice. You may do what you like with them. A child can lead them with a thread. Afloat! Phew! Defend us from serving under the flag of a merchantman—British or Yankee. Language which

belongs to the merchant-service alone; hard blows which belong peculiarly to the galleys, rough treatment, such as a Moorish prisoner used to look for—all these you may expect from the merchant captain.

But Captain Bowker was ashore now, and it was only from occasional hints in conversation that you got any gleams of light as to the other side of him.

Mr. Eddrup did not smoke. He sat at the window, and leaned his head on his hand.

"They're a wild set downstairs," said Captain Bowker. "They want a little discipline."

"They are all young," said Mr. Eddrup—"all young. We pardon everything to the young." He turned to Frank, smiling.

"I don't know," said Frank. "I should not be inclined to pardon everything to the young. I like men of my own age—I suppose I am young—to behave with some approach to good manners, as well as to be men of honour."

"Honourable. Yes—yes. The young must be always honourable. We can pardon anything but dishonesty. But good manners. Surely, sir, it is a very small matter."

"Well, yes—but a sufficiently important small matter, Mr. Eddrup. May I light a cigar?"

He lit and smoked one of Dick's Havanas—Captain Bowker all the while puffing vigorously at a pipe with a long cherry stick, which held about an ounce or so of cut-up ship tobacco. No one came near them except Mrs. Skimp, who brought up tea. She gave Frank his cup, whispering in his ear as she did so—

"It's a shilling a-week extra. Only Mr. Eddrup and Cap'en Bowker has it."

Presently Mr. Eddrup got up, and stole out of the room. Frank saw him cross the square and disappear in one of the streets on the other side.

"He always goes out at eight every night, and comes home at eleven," said Captain Bowker.

"What is he?"

Captain Bowker evaded the question.

"He's great company for me. If it warn't for him, Skimp's would be as dull as my old cabin in the Doldrums. I should go to live at Poplar, where I've got chums. You never went a long sea-voyage, I suppose?"

"No longer than from Newhaven to Dieppe."

"Ah! then you've got to find out what solitude means. Be a skipper, sir, and you'll know. They look up to us, sir, and envy our position. It's natural they should." He spoke as if he was an admiral at least. "But it isn't all sailing with the sou'-west trade wind aft. Some of us drink. That's bad. Now, beyond my four or five goes of grog of a night, a pan-kin or so of a morning, another about noon, and one or two after dinner, I never did drink. I'm not one of your everlasting nippers. And what's the consequence, sir? Here I am, sound in limb at fifty-five. Pensioned off by my noble firm after forty years service, and happy for the rest of my days."

He paused, and rang the bell.

"Bring the usual, Mary, and two tumblers. You shall have a glass of my rum to-night, Mr. Melliship. What was I a-saying?"

"You were saying that you were going to be happy for the rest of your days. So I suppose you are going to take a wife, Captain Bowker."

"A wife! The Lord forbid! No, sir, I did that once—fifteen years ago—once too often. Ah! well—she's dead; at least, I suppose so." He turned quite pale, and beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. "Well, let that pass. What kept me from drink was, that I had a resource which is given to few men. Do you compose, sir?"

"Compose? Music?"

"No — music — nonsense! Anybody can make music. Verses, sir,—immortal verses. That's what I used to spend my time in doing when I was below in the cabin. Now here"—he pulled a folded and frayed piece of paper out of his pocket—"here is a copy I made in my last voyage home. Read it, and tell me candidly what you think of it."

Frank opened it. It began—

"'Tis fearful, when the running gear is taut,
And creaking davits yield a frail support."

"Hem! Rhyme rather halts here, doesn't it? Shall I read the rest at my leisure, Captain Bowker?"

"No, no—no time like the present. Give me hold, young man. Now, then—stand by—here's the rum. So, sit steady, and listen."

He read his composition. Frank listened as one in a dream. What next? To sing in a music hall, to live at Skimp's, to sit at the same table with Captain Hamilton, to hear Captain Bowker read his verses; this was not encouraging. He would have to go to the Palace in the morning, to rehearsal. After all, it is necessary to live. At least, one would be able to pay one's way on three guineas a week.

"So, like the Doldrums' calm, his onward way
Is checked who dares thy laws to disobey."

It was the termination of Captain Bowker's poem. Frank woke up.

"Very good indeed, Captain Bowker. The last lines especially—very good. They remind me of Pope.

So, like the Doldrums' onward way, his calm
Is checked who dares to—' "

"Not quite right," said the divine bard, with a smile. "But you are not a sailor. Shall I read it again?"

"No, don't—pray don't."

"I won't. Let us talk."

That meant, "Let me talk."

Frank lay back in his easy chair, and dreamed of Grace, and the pleasant country-side. How was he to win her;—how to pay off those debts? It was not a hopeful reverie. There are times when the veil of illusion falls off. It is at best but a fog, most common in the morning of life, and extremely pretty when the sun shines upon it. It was fallen now. Frank measured the distance between himself and Grace, and saw that it was widening every day.

Captain Bowker recalled him. He was maundering on:—

"—when I commanded the *Merry Moonshine*, in the Chinese coolie trade, running to Trinidad. It was an anxious time, because we had four hundred of them aboard, and not too much rice. They used to murder each other—ten, a dozen or so—every night. That lessened the numbers."

"What did they do that for?"

"What do men always fight about? Then we had bad weather—terrible bad weather; got on the edge of a cyclone. We had the coolies battened down

'tween decks: and what with the noise of the storm, and the cries of them wild cats, and the mainmast going by the board, I do assure you it was as much as I could do to get that poem finished. As it was, it wasn't really finished till I got home—for there was a lot more unpleasantness. We put in at Allegoey Bay; and directly the coolies caught sight of land, I'm blest if forty or fifty didn't chuck themselves out of the ports and overboard, to swim ashore. I do not remember," he said, stroking his nose—"I do not remember hearing that any of them got there. There's sharks off that coast, you know. But think of the loss it was to me!"

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER walking through a number of narrow and dark passages, Frank found himself at last in the North London Palace of Amusement and Aristocratic Lounge.

Dingy and dirty by daylight it appeared.

Plenty of light—to show the tawdry, gas and smoke-tarnished state of the decorations—came in through a lantern in the great domed roof; for the place had once been a daylight exhibition—a sort of superior Polytechnic, started at the same time as the mechanics' institutes, whither it was thought the people would eagerly flock to improve their minds. Mr. Leweson's company could therefore rehearse comfortably without the gas—except on very dark and foggy days.

The features of the building struck Frank as something familiar. His father and the flavour of Bath buns flashed upon him; for memory mixes incongruous

elements as old recollections pour upon us. He had once been taken there as a little boy, when what was now a music hall had been the Lyceum. The place had now, however, tumbled down from its high estate, and in its fall had ruined half a dozen speculators before the genius of a Leweson made it pay.

Frank looked round. It was the same place—he was sure of that; though how changed was all about him!

He remembered the great, bare hall, with half a dozen dreary electric machines; the galleries, round which geological specimens were arranged; its side wings, where were displayed such objects as ancient British pottery, specimens of early type, botanical collections, and other dry and improving things. He remembered how he had been led round, wearily yawning, with a party of girls who began by yawning too, and ended by snapping at each other. All the time there had been the buzz of a lecturer's voice, as he addressed an audience consisting of an uncle and two miserable nephews, on the more recent improvements in machinery employed in the manufacture of cotton fabrics. And he remembered how his heart lightened up when they came to a refreshment stall, and everybody had a cake.

He rubbed his eyes, and looked round. Yes—it was the same place; but where the electric machines had stood was now a stage, where the geological collection had formerly been was now a row of private boxes. The apparatus had all disappeared: only the refreshment-room remained, and this was vastly increased and improved.

“Here we are,” said Mr. Leweson. “This is where

the loonatics come every night to stare, and listen, and drink. Amuse yourself by looking for half an hour or so."

"I have been here before," Frank began.

"Everybody comes here—it's one of the sights of London," said Mr. Leweson, interrupting him; "and the loonatics——"

It was Frank's turn to interrupt.

"I mean years ago, when it used to be called the Lyceum. I was a boy then."

"Phyoo!" the proprietor whistled. "Ah! quite another thing. It was a Limited Li Company. It would have smashed 'em all up instead of being smashed itself, if it hadn't been. It has been lots of things since then. Nobody made it pay till I took it in hand. Mark me," continued Mr. Leweson, with great gravity, and in his deepest voice—

"Well, sir."

"That'll be the end of that round place they're building at Kensington."

"What, the Albert Hall?" cried Frank.

"Yes; certain to come to it—only a question of time. Be a place just like this, and with the Horticultural Gardens at the back to walk out into and dance in the summer—Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and Cremorne thrown into one would be nothing to it. I'd give—I'd give—there, I don't know what I wouldn't give a year for that place, with the gardens thrown in; and pay the biggest dividend that ever was paid by anything in this world before."

"But, my dear sir," Frank began, shaking his head.

"Ah, you may laugh: and I may not, and I dare say I shall not, live to see it, but that is the future of

those two places, as sure as eggs are eggs—take my word for it. But, there, I must leave you and attend to my business—they want me. Go anywhere you like, only not on the stage just yet—you'd be in the way. The new ballet is just coming on."

Mr. Leweson left Frank in front of the stage, and disappeared himself down a trap-door in the orchestra.

Frank took a seat in a box near the stage, and looked about him.

The scene was new to him, and, apart from the novelty, was interesting in itself.

The curtain was up. It revealed an immense stage, crowded with children, girls, and men. The wings and drops were representations of the foliage of a forest of palms. In the background was a vast gold fan, which at night unfolded and displayed Titania, Queen of the Fairies, reclining among her attendant sprites and fays.

In front, close to the wire fencing of the footlights, stood a little, mean table, covered with slips of manuscript. At the table sat the chief of the orchestra, making annotations on his score with a red chalk pencil, sometimes from the manuscripts, sometimes without reference to them. By the conductor's side stood an iron music-stand, three empty rush-bottomed chairs, and a fiddle in a case.

The rehearsal had not yet begun, and the girls were collected in little knots, always breaking up and re-forming; chattering together like so many grasshoppers, and laughing perpetually, at nothing at all, and just out of the irrepressible gaiety of their hearts. At the sides of the proscenium were two sheets of looking-glass. These were a great source of attraction,

and never idle for a second. Constantly, one or two of the girls would leave the rest, and, going in front of the glass, execute a few choregic gyrations quite gravely, no one taking the least notice of them, nor they of any one else. It was quaint to see them staidly pirouetting, gyrating, and posturing before these great glasses, each one totally regardless of the rest. The private practice and self-examination before a woman's most faithful confessor accomplished, the young ladies would retire to their friends, and join in the never-ending chatter. Directly they left the mirrors, their places were seized by a lot of tiny children—girls—who, in ragged dresses, mere little children of the gutter, solemnly ambled up and down in front of the glass, put out their chubby little legs, and waved their little red arms. They never tired of looking at themselves. When their elder sisters came and turned them out, they fled like wasps from a honey pot. The moment the coast was clear, back they all came, tumbling over each other in their eagerness to be in the front, and began once more the children's imitation of their elders' vanities.

Frank looked on at this lively scene with great interest. He had never seen a rehearsal before. From what he had heard of the young ladies of the ballet, he had been accustomed to regard them as melancholy victims of mistaken art—persons who were compelled by want to sacrifice their self-respect, and go through a nightly course of public posturing for the admiration of a foolish crowd. Now he met them in flesh and blood, he found all his original ideas knocked on the head. So far from having no self-respect, they appeared to be full of it; so far from having any sense

of humiliation, they evidently delighted in their calling. Of course, it will be seen that Frank was exceedingly inexperienced. At the same time, had he been the most hardened old *roué* that ever walked behind the scenes, he could not but be struck with the natural gaiety and light-heartedness of the girls. It was all real: no affectation or false semblance. They were all happy, all laughing, all chattering, all dancing, running, and capering about the stage.

The men and boys kept at the back. They were an exceedingly shady-looking lot. As it afterwards appeared, their business in the ballet was to come in and make gestures, to fill up the background, to stand in attitudes, and perform other easy and elementary parts which belong to dramatic representation.

The girls had nothing to say to them; and they, for their part, never spoke to the girls, but kept to themselves under Titania's great fan.

A little commotion among the crowd. It opened, and made a way for Mr. Leweson, the master of the ballet, and his two assistants. The three professors of the art of dancing were French—that was patent at half a glance. The same sallow, shaven cheeks, the same cropped black moustache, the same height, belonged to all. As Mrs. Partington would say, they might all three have been twins. And this natural resemblance was heightened by their all appearing in bluish pilot jackets, rather tight-fitting black trousers, and cloth boots.

Mr. Leweson signed to a pale man to open the fiddle case, and begin.

"We've got lots of work to get through, Mr. Sauerhäring"—the master of the ballet was an Alsatian by

birth—"so let us get on. I want to see that ballet of butterflies perfect this afternoon."

"M'sieur, you shall see it."

"It's a very stiff job."

"Bah!—pooh!" dissented Sauerhäring. "It—is—noth—thing."

"Glad to hear it."

"Psha! You shall see it pairfect, while you say one, two." He looked at the fiddler. "Go on," he said.

His assistants vanished among the girls, when they were seen at intervals among the crowds of coryphées, setting good example. The fiddler struck up, and the ballet commenced. The girls were dressed in all kinds of costumes. Some had their plain walking-dresses of stuff or black silk, only with their bonnets and jackets off: some had the "bodies" of the dress—the skirts being removed—leaving them in soiled muslins; some wore a kind of short petticoat; one or two were in what theatrical critics call page dress, but what the girls call "shapes," such as they would appear in at night. They all wore silk stockings, some of them having on a kind of red gaiters, which Frank took to be elastic, and intended to strengthen the limb. He had noticed, previous to the rehearsal, one or two artistes more conscientious than the rest engaged in diligently rubbing their ankles and the circumjacent regions. At first he could not make out the reason of this manoeuvre, but was at length reminded of Lillie Bridge and professional runners. Then he knew what it was meant for.

"Go an," said the ballet master, pronouncing the word as if he were an Irishman—"go an, lad-ees."

They went "an" in that vast hall, with one spectator—Frank—to the scraping of the solitary fiddle. It marked time: but for anything else, a battalion of Guards might as well have marched to the sounds of one penny whistle, or a cathedral choir have been accompanied by a jew's harp. They were learning the figures of the butterflies' ballet, and began the first with great vigour and energy.

But they were not right about it.

M. Sauerhäring threw out his arms, and trilled a prolonged guttural "Ah———h!"

"Bah!—pooh!—phit!—tush!—psha!" he cried in a string, and then gave a "klick," like a whole cab-rank starting in pursuit of a double fare.

The music stopped. The ladies laughed. The professor said—

"Stupeed! this is the step."

Then he capered solemnly in front of them.

"One, two; one, two—lal-lal-la, lal-lal-la; one, two; three, four."

Behind him, a long file of coryphées imitated his movements. To Frank, Sauerhäring's limbs seemed to be of india-rubber as he shook them from side to side.

"One, two—one, two. Now, again."

The odd thing being that they never once stopped chattering to each other and laughing.

They were admirably drilled. Not one but kept her eye fixed upon the master—that is, one eye, the other being given up to seeing how the other girls were getting on. It was wonderful to see them catching the combinations, and patiently working them out. As for patience, it was difficult to say whether the girls were more patient or the master more painstaking.

Presently the chief of the orchestra crossed the stage to M. Sauerhäring. Directly the master turned to speak to him, the girls began to romp about, one after the other darting from the ranks, and executing a pirouette on her own account in the centre of the stage, making believe to be for once a *première danseuse*. Then the master turned round, and order was re-established.

Presently came the children's turn. A ragged regiment they were by daylight; at night, butterflies and moths—all spangle and gauze. Now, with muddy stockings and shoes full of holes, giving M. Sauerhäring and his *aides de camp* a vast deal more trouble to teach them one figure than their elder sisters would do in learning a dozen. Their drilling lasted half an hour at least; and at least once in two minutes the indefatigable, and as it appeared, ubiquitous Sauerhäring stopped fiddle and children with his guttural, tremulant "Ah—h—h!" and reeled off the five expressions of discontent he had learned from a phrase book of the English tongue in the paternal orchard in his own Alsace—

"Bah!—pooh!—phit!—tush!—psha!"

To him they were a word in five syllables, and he ejaculated them to a sort of tune, as an angry vocalist might sound his "Do, re, mi, fa, sol."

Among the children, one little mite about six years attracted Frank's attention. She had been the most assiduous while she was on the stage in ambling up and down before the mirrors. Now she led off the train of children with a precision and solemnity that were most edifying, executing her simple steps most carefully and conscientiously. The moment she was

free again, she ran off to the looking-glass, and practised them over again, with many curtseys and salutes, wonderful to see. That child will rise and be heard of in her profession, unless some unlucky accident cuts her off.

While this branch of the *corps de ballet* were practising figures and groupings, there came upon the scene one of the principal dancers, dressed as if for the evening, but without any flowers or jewels. She walked across the front of the stage, regarding the lower members of the profession with that stare that sees nothing, common enough among the gentle daughters of England's aristocracy. A mere ballet girl, a troupe of ballet girls, what could they possibly be in the eyes of Mdlle. Goldoni, from the opera house of Milan? In her hand she bore a small watering-pot, with which she sprinkled the boards in front of the looking-glass on the left, took possession of it, and proceeded to practise by herself. First, she turned round on the left toe, with the right leg a foot and a half above her head; then she performed the same manœuvre with her right toe and left leg; then she placed her foot as high up on the gilded pillar of the proscenium as she could, and kept it there; then she began arching her feet before the glass; then she went over the whole performance again—never disturbed by the others, who took no manner of notice of her, and never herself taking the least notice of the rest;—all the while looking in the glass with a sort of curiosity, as if the legs belonged to somebody else. One or two other people, including a lady of immense proportions, in black velvet, came in, and sat on chairs in front of the stage. The little children romped round the house, and vaulted about over the backs of the seats. The

unhappy-looking youths, in felt hats and greasy coats, at the back went through the semblance of what they were about to perform at night in spangles and hodden suits. The assistant ballet-masters capered and danced all over the stage. The girls went through their drill again and again. No one got tired. The melancholy fiddler, whose strains produced a profoundly saddening effect on Frank, played on with the pertinacity and monotony of an organ grinder. The conductor of the orchestra made his notes on the music; the big lady in black velvet gazed on unweariedly; the manager, Mr. Leweson, came and went, bringing his big head upon the stage and taking it off again at intervals.

At last he came round to Frank's box with a portfolio in his hand.

"Always a lot to do with the production of a new ballet. Now let us talk while they finish the rehearsal. You see, Mr. Melliship, the loonatics who come here like a ballet: not that they care, bless you, what it's like, or what it means, so long as there's plenty of short skirts on the stage. But it must be a Spectàrcle! Another thing the loonatics that frequent this miserable Palace of Humbug like is the sight of somebody running the risk of breaking their bones. So we've got a trapeze rigged up, as you see. But they must needs have a woman, so we've got the Divine Giulia—Giulia Silvani—to perform with her father. I daresay they'll be round presently. Comic songs of course they must have. We've got the Inexpressible Jones, and the Incomparable and Aristocratic Arthur De Vere. They only come at night, of course. Beautiful specimens of the aristocracy, both of them—but they go down with the loonatics."

He stopped, and began to look about in his portfolio.

He produced a manuscript.

"Now, with a singer like yourself, there are only two lines open. You must give up altogether the notion that the British loonatic wants music. He doesn't. He wants sentiment to make him cry, and patriotism to warm up his puny little heart. I'm ashamed of him, Mr. Melliship—I am, indeed. But what can I do? Here I am, after advertising you yesterday in all the papers, and sending sandwiches up and down the streets to-day——"

"Advertising me!"

"Yes. Look here: wonder you didn't see it as you came along."

He called one of the children, and sent her for a bill. She presently returned with a flaming poster.

NORTH LONDON PALACE OF AMUSEMENT
AND ARISTOCRATIC LOUNGE.

IN ADDITION TO THE
GALAXY OF TALENT

Already engaged, the Manager has great pleasure in announcing that he has secured, for a short time only, the services of the

NEW AND GREAT ANGLO-ITALIAN TENOR,

SIGNOR CIPRIANO.

The Signor, who has never sung before in England, but who is well known to possess the finest Tenor Voice in the World, will Sing

TO-NIGHT,

AND UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE,

THREE BALLADS.

EVERY EVENING,

At Half-past Eight and Half-past Nine.

Across this announcement was a coloured strip, with "To-night" upon it.

Frank read it with a mixed feeling of annoyance and amusement. After all it didn't matter. His new grand name was better, at any rate, than his own—if he must appear before a British audience.

"I suppose it's all right," he said, doubtfully, handing it back.

"Of course it is; but the thing is, what you're to sing. Now, I asked my man"—he meant a musical understrapper who composed songs for him, words and music, at a pound a-piece—"I asked my man to knock me off a little thing in imitation of the Christy's songs of domestic pathos—you know—like 'Slam the door loudly, for mother's asleep,' 'Touch the place softly, my pretty Louise,' 'Father, come home, for mother is tight';—charming songs, you know, with a chorus soft and whispered at the end, so as to bring the tears in the people's eyes. Now, what do you think he brought me this morning. Read that."

He looked at Frank curiously, while the latter read it and laughed.

It was a song based on one of the humblest and most ordinary topics of "domestic pathos," and ran thus:—

"He will catch it from his mother,
For the widow's heart is low,
And beneath the weeping willows
Still her wayward child will go,
O'er the river course the shadows—
He has spoiled his boots and hat—
While the sunset lights the meadows,
For his mother spank the brat."

"'Vulgar and coarse'? I knew you'd say so," said the Bighead. "It's a pity, too. My man told me it

was written in direct imitation of the great original—with whispered chorus, and all. See what a capital effect it would have. You in the centre, head held down in attitude of listening—so; voices behind—unseen, you know—‘for his mother’—‘for his mother’—‘for his mother’—dying away, with a harp obbligato to follow.”

“I’ll sing it, if you like,” said Frank. “What does it matter, if the people like it?”

“Ah, we must follow the loonatics, not lead ’em as I should wish,” said Mr. Leweson, sighing. “Well, well, we’ll have it; though it’s a shame—it’s a shame to ask a man with your voice to sing such a song. Now for the second—‘The Bay of Biscay.’ It will suit you well. They’ll encore that; or you may sing ‘The Death of Nelson.’ And now to try the room.”

He led the way to the stage, had a piano wheeled in, sat down, and directed Frank where to stand—giving him, at the same time, a few hints on the art of bowing to an assemblage of British loonatics.

The acoustic properties of the place were splendid. Frank felt as if he had never sung in his life before, as he heard his own voice filling the great building and echoing in the roof.

“What do you think of that?” whispered Mr. Leweson to the conductor.

“How long have you got him for?”

“Two months’ agreement first. I’m going to make him sign directly.”

“How much?”

“Three guineas.”

“Make it six months. You won’t keep him a day beyond his time.”

Frank finished.

"How was that, Mr. Leweson?"

"Very good—very good. A little softer at the finish: don't be afraid they won't hear you. I'll have the chorus all right for you by the time you come this evening. Now for 'The Death of Nelson.' You make the glasses ring, if you like. Come in Patty, my dear. Where's your father?"

This was to a new comer—a singularly pretty, modest-looking girl. He did not wait for an answer to his question, but began at once.

Frank finished the song, and Mr. Leweson clapped his hands in applause.

"That'll bring the house down, if anything will. Bravo, Mr.—I mean, Signor Cipriano, you know. Now, look here—I'm not going to have you encored, and spoiling your voice, to please a lot of loonatics, so they needn't think it. To-night you may do it. I shall go on myself, and make a speech after it. You'll hear me. Patty, this is our new singer—a very different sort to the rest, as you'll find. Signor, this is the Divine Giulia Silvani—only at home we call her Patty Silver; and she's worth her weight in gold, I can tell you. Here's her father."

Frank took off his hat, and shook hands with the girl. Her hands were rough and hard, her fingers thick—he noticed that as she stood gloveless on the stage. But her face was wonderfully soft and delicate in expression: one of those faces—the features not too good, and perhaps commonplace in character—which one meets from time to time in the London streets;—not the face of a lady at all, but, at the same time a lovable and good face. She was different to the

ballet girls, somehow—had none of their restlessness, did not laugh, did not jump about before the glass; stood quietly beside the piano, and just listened and waited. She was the female trapezist, and with her father performed the Miraculous Flying Leap for Life every night. Her little brother completed the talented Silvani Family; and, though yet of tender years, was admitted to a trifling performance on a small trapeze of his own, from which he could not fall more than twenty or thirty feet or so—a mere trifle to a child of ten.

The family were special favourites of the manager, for some reason or other. His big head had a big heart connected with it, as more than one in the place had found out.

After singing his songs, and receiving the suggestions of his employer, Frank went with him to his private room. A paper was lying on the table.

“That’s your agreement, Mr. Melliship. You pledge yourself to sing for me, and only me, for two months, at a fixed salary of three guineas a week, at least three ballads or songs every night. I introduce you to the public, and have my profit out of the small salary you will get. You see, Mr. Melliship, I’m a plain man. I like your voice. I like your appearance. I am making terms advantageous to myself, but not bad for you. And if you were to go to anybody in London, you wouldn’t get better for a first engagement. My conductor advised me to nail you down for six months, but I keep to my original terms. Treat me well, Mr. Melliship, and I’ll treat you well. So there we are; and, if you’ll sign, a pint of champagne and a dry biscuit will help us along.”

Frank drank the champagne, signed his name, and went away, free until eight.

He dined at Mrs. Skimp's where old Mr. Eddrup was, as usual, made the butt of "Captain" Hamilton's wit. After dinner he smoked a pipe in the garden of the square; and then, as the time was fast approaching, he dressed himself with considerable care, and walked to the Palace.

The place was crowded. Nearly every man had a glass before him, and a pipe or a cigar in his mouth. There were constant cries of "Waiter," constant popping of corks. The smell of tobacco was overpowering. The heat and the gas made the place almost intolerable. Frank stood at the side-wings while a ballet went on—not that which he had seen rehearsed, but a simpler one, intended to open the evening.

"After this, the Inexpressible Jones. After him, you," said Mr. Leweson. "That's to take him down a few pegs. He thinks he's got a tenor. With a voice like a cow."

The Inexpressible sang. He was encored. He sang again. They wanted to encore him a second time. It was a charming pastoral, relating how he, the I. J., had been walking one evening in the fields, with an umbrella, and had there met a young lady belonging to the same exalted rank among the aristocracy as himself; how he had held a conversation with her under his umbrella; how she had promised to meet him the next evening, provided he came with his umbrella; how he had kept his appointment, with his umbrella, and how she had not. It was a comic song,

acted with an umbrella, so true to life that the "loonatics" shrieked with laughter.

When the laughter had quite subsided, it was Frank's turn to go on.

Mr. Leweson was below among the audience, contemplating his patrons with an air of undisguised contempt. He was the first person Frank saw in the mass of heads beneath and in front of him.

For a moment, he trembled and lost his nerve. Only for a moment. As the piano struck up, he managed to see the words that were swimming before him, and plunged at once into his ballad of the domestic affections.

The chorus was more than admirable—it was superb: an invisible chorus, in soft voices, murmuring the refrain like an echo—

"For his mother—for his mother—for his mother;"

till the people cried at the pathos.

"The loonatics," he heard the manager growling to himself.

The applause was tremendous. He retired amid a general yell of "'core—'core!" and reappeared a moment after with flushed cheeks—for even the approbation of "loonatics" is something—to sing "The Death of Nelson."

Frank went home that night satisfied, if not happy. He was a success at last—if only a success at three guineas a week. He prayed fervently that no old friends would come to detect him. If only he could preserve his incognito, all would be well.

He reckoned only on old friends. He had forgotten new acquaintances.

The very next day, at dinner, after a general whispering at the upper end of the table, which Mr. Eddrup interpreted to mean an organized attack upon himself, Captain Hamilton turned to him, and openly congratulated him on his success the preceding evening at the North London Palace of Amusement.

"Of course," said the gallant officer, "it was an unexpected pleasure to see, in the person of Signor Cipriano, a gentleman who does us the favour to dine at our humble table."

Frank reddened, and could find nothing to say.

Mr. Eddrup answered for him. It was the first time the old man had ever been known to speak.

"I congratulate you," he said to Frank, "on the possession of a talent which enables you to take honest work. Believe me, sir, all work is honest."

"Bravo, old Eddrup!" shouted the medical student. "We've made him speak at last. I always knew he was one of the most eloquent orators going."

Frank turned with flushing cheeks.

"At all events," he said, "it is better to sing at a public place than to—to—"

"To what, sir?" said the student.

"Singing cad!" escaped the Captain's lips, in tones very clearly audible.

Frank half rose from his seat, and turned towards the Captain.

"Better than loafing about in billiard-rooms, and on suburban racecourses, Captain Hamilton."

There was a dead silence.

"After dinner, sir," said Captain Hamilton, after a pause, "we must have a word together."

"And me, too," said the medical student, with disregard for grammar.

"Stick to 'em," whispered Captain Bowker. "Stick to 'em. They're only curs. I'll see fair play."

After dinner, Captain Hamilton, none of the rest leaving the room, came up to Frank as he stood in the window.

"Sir, you have insulted me."

"Probably."

It was said calmly, but Frank's lips were trembling.

"Sir, you must give me satisfaction."

"Take it, then," shouted the young man, striking out with his left arm.

The Captain fell—and did not get up again.

"Oh! gentlemen—gentlemen," cried Mrs. Skimp, running before Frank—"don't fight—oh! pray don't fight! He owes me for six weeks," she whispered.

"I said he was a loafer—a welcher. I know he is. I have seen him ducked in a horsepond before to-day," said Frank, who was recovering his calmness.

The others all burst out laughing, except the medical student, who thought that perhaps his turn was coming next.

The Captain rose slowly, but with dignity.

"This," he said, "will not end here. You will hear from me to-morrow."

He was leaving the room, the medical student going with him.

"Stop," said Frank. "There is something else to be said. Both yesterday and to-day—and, I believe, always—there has been made a series of attacks, personal, insulting, and caddish, on an old gentleman of perfectly inoffensive habits—Mr. Eddrup. The two

principal offenders are you two—Captain Hamilton and you—whatever your name is”—he pointed to the medical student. “Now, as I, for one, decline to belong to those who wilfully insult an old man, I intend to take his quarrel upon myself. Who ever insults Mr. Eddrup henceforth, insults me. Now, Captain Hamilton, and you other, you may go to the devil.”

They went out.

Mrs. Skimp was the only one who regretted the incident.

“Six weeks due from the Captain,” she moaned, “and four from the other.”

“Sir,” said Captain Bowker, wringing Frank’s hand, “I’m proud of you. You’re a good fellow, sir—a good fellow. I wish I could do something for you.”

Frank laughed.

“You can,” he said. “You can come and hear me sing ‘The Death of Nelson,’ if you like.”

“By the Lord, I will,” said the Captain. “I haven’t been to a place of amusement for ten years. I’ll go to-night.”

Mr. Eddrup said nothing. In his usual quiet and methodical manner, he stepped out of the room, and went upstairs.

In many cheap boarding-houses there is a Père Goriot, young or old. In very few is there a man to be found with courage to stand up and protect a butt from the assaults of his enemies.

That night, Captain Hamilton went out, and came back no more. His effects, when examined, were found to consist principally of one trunk, locked—filled with stones wrapped in newspapers.

CHAPTER VII.

AT an early hour on the morning after his "first appearance," Frank awoke with strangely mingled feelings of disgust and pride. Mr. Leweson's loonatics had cheered him to the skies: that was something. On the other hand, to have been cheered by loonatics was not in itself, after the first surprise, an exhilarating memory. He got up, cursing his fate.

He went down to the palace, after breakfast, in the gloomiest frame of mind. He found the same ballet rehearsal going on, only the second time it was not by any means so interesting, having lost its novelty. Ballet girls, he was able to remark, romantic as the profession appears to outsiders, possess much of the commonplace nature of the untutored feminine animal. He speculated on their probable ambition, on the subjects which occupied their minds, and exercised their intellects. Subsequent investigation, followed by discovery, taught him in time that they never do think at all, except about the means of getting dress, and have no intellects to exercise. Mr. Leweson was in his office, but too busy to see him, only sending out a note that the performance of last night might be repeated if he wished; if not, he only had to select his own songs.

Frank felt quite indifferent as to what songs he sang, and so was turning away to leave the place, when he saw the pretty girl to whom he had been introduced the day before—the Divine Giulia. She was with her father, superintending the arrangement of certain trapeze ropes for a new feat they were to perform that evening. Her dress was changed. She

had on the singular costume which was invented, I suppose, when female gymnasts first came into fashion—something like the “page” dress of the stage. The Divine Giulia was attired in Turkish trousers—which disappeared at night—a crimson scarf, and what I have reason to believe is called a chemisette. Her hair—brown, full, and wavy—was gathered up at the back of her head in such rich masses that no chignon was necessary. Her father was also dressed in the uniform of his profession, but without the spangles which covered him in the evening. With them was a little boy, the youthful Joey, also attired in the family costume. Frank stayed to look.

“May I look on while you practise?” he asked, shaking hands with the acrobat and his daughter.

“Of course you may, Mr.—Signor.”

“Signor Cipriano, father,” said Patty.

“My name is Melliship,” said Frank, reddening.

“You may help us, too,” said the girl. “Set this mattress straight. So. Now lay this one along the tables. That is right. Ready, father?”

One of the men regularly employed stood at the bar, to set it swinging. They were to fly, one after the other—the girl first—across the house, swinging from one trapeze to the next, and landing on a little platform at the end: a common feat enough, complicated by what the playbills called a summersault in “mid-air” by the father.

Silvani, père, was a stout, strong-built man, about forty years of age, or a little over. The muscles showed through his tight fleshings like rope bands.

“Fancy having to assist your governor in turning summersaults,” thought Frank.

It was a question whether the ropes should not be lengthened by a foot or so, which would naturally increase the distance to be traversed, but lessen the danger. Mr. Silver gave it against the longer length.

"But you may kill yourself," said Frank, "for want of that extra foot."

"I don't think so. After all, a man can only die once. Patty, my dear, you're not afraid?"

She shook her head merrily, and mounted the ladder. Frank trembled as she stood at the top—slight, graceful, slender—poising herself like a bird on the wing. Her father mounted after her, and took another pair of ropes, standing behind her.

She gave a sign: the man set the trapeze swinging, and Patty let herself go. The instant she touched the first bar, her father followed, catching it as it swung back when she left it. In a moment, they were standing side by side on a platform in front of the first circle.

"Not quite steady enough. We must do it again."

"No, don't," cried Frank—"don't. Surely once is enough."

The girl laughed, and climbed again. Frank was standing on the mattress at the far end of the house, nearly under the landing-place—that is to say, close under the dress circle. The feat looked a great deal more dangerous in an empty theatre, by daylight, than when the gas was lit, and the place crammed with spectators.

Now, whether his nervousness communicated itself to Patty, I know not; but when she left the two rings, and should have caught the first bar, she missed it. Frank rushed forward, and caught her by the shoul-

ders, just as she would have fallen heavily on the mattresses.

The weight of a girl of eighteen, though she be a trapezist in full training, is no small matter—particularly when the velocity of her flight is taken into consideration. The momentum of a body in motion is represented, in applied mathematics, as a quantity composed of the mass multiplied by the velocity—which is, to the outer world, much as if one were to say pigs multiplied by candles. You will realize what is meant if anything heavy falls upon you. Frank fell back, with Patty upon him. She was up in an instant, unhurt.

Her father, seeing the accident as he flew through the air, kept tight hold of his rings, and swung backwards and forwards until he could safely alight.

“Why, Patty,” he cried, “I’ve never known you do such a thing before.”

The girl was up in a moment—shaken, but not hurt. Frank was not so fortunate. Her head butting full upon his nose, caused that member to bleed: a prosaic ending to a deed of some heroism and skill—for he caught her like a cricket ball, only with the softest and most delicate handling possible, just as if he had always been practising the art of catching trapeze girls so as not to hurt them.

Mr. Leweson, too, came running up. He was just in time to witness the accident.

“Are you hurt, Patty—are you hurt?”

“Not a bit—not a bit:” her lip was trembling in the effort to suppress an hysterical sob. “I should have been, if it had not been for Mr. Melliship, though. We ought to ask him if he is hurt.”

Frank was holding his handkerchief to his nose, and only shook his head, to intimate that the damage done was such as could easily be repaired.

"Good heaven!" cried Mr. Leweson; "and you might have flown straight against the woodwork. Mr. Melliship, it was splendid—splendidly done, sir."

"Well," said Mr. Silver, "as nobody's hurt, and we've got to do it to-night, I suppose we'd better try it again, Patty."

"No—no," began Frank.

"Young gentleman," said Mr. Silver, "please don't interfere with our professional work."

"You are not too much shaken, Patty?" interposed the manager.

"Not shaken a bit. Now, father, we'll do it this time."

She ran up the ladder lightly with her rings, flew through the air from bar to bar, and arrived at the landing-stage with the precision of a bird, followed by her sire.

"Now, there," said Mr. Leweson, "is a splendid creature for you. Now you see why I wanted you to go on the trapeze with Giulia. Think of the Triple Act that I had in my mind—Signor Silvani holding the rings; three bars, each two feet lower than the other; on the Signor's shoulders you would stand, Giulia on yours. The flight through the air: the first bar for Giulia, the second for you, the third for the father of the family. The most magnificent idea in acrobatism ever conceived. But there, if it can't be, it can't, of course. Now, then, Patty, hoist up the boy, and get your practice done."

He walked aside, with his hand in Frank's arm, while the child went through his performances.

"Mr. Melliship," he said abruptly, "you are a gentleman, that is clear. I daresay an army man, now."

"No—I told you—I am a Cambridge man."

"Ah!—well. But there are different sorts of gentlemen, you see. Now, I think more goes to make a gentleman than knowing how to eat, and talk, and dress, and behave. I know the breed is rare; but there is a sort of gentleman in this country who does not run after every pretty face he meets, fancying that every pretty girl is his natural prey. I say there is that sort of gentleman in the world, and I should be very glad to think you belong to the kind, Mr. Melliship. That's a long preamble; but what I mean is this—excuse my plain speaking—but I don't want my little Patty humbugged, and I won't have it, sir, I say—I won't have it, by any one. There—there—I'm a fool."

"You can trust me," said Frank. "I am not likely either to fall in love with her, or she with me."

"Humph!" growled the man with the big head, looking curiously at him. "I don't know that. Well—well—I've said what I wanted to, and you are not angry; so it is all right. Come and have some fizz, Patty, my girl. After your shake, it will do you good."

They all went to the manager's room, when he produced a bottle of champagne, which they discussed together. If Mr. Leweson had a weakness, it was for champagne. Patty Silver shared it. Champagne was the one thing connected with the department of the interior which Patty cared for.

"Very odd," thought Frank. "Here's the manager

giving champagne to a family of acrobats. Wonder if they always do it at music halls."

I believe, as a rule, that acrobats are not so well treated by managers.

In this particular case there were reasons why Mr. Leweson was especially kind to his talented Silvani Family. It is a story which hardly belongs to us. In the years gone by, there had been a forlorn little Israelite boy, whose father and mother died in a far-off land, leaving him alone to the care of strangers. None of his own people were in that American town. Then a Christian man, a blacksmith by trade, took him in, and housed him. The Christian man was Signor Silvani's father; the little Jew was Mr. Emmanuel Leweson. Years went on. The Jew became a musician, a singer, a composer; the Christians went down in the world; and the whirligig of time brought them all together again—Harry Silver an acrobat—Emmanuel Leweson the manager and part proprietor—principal shareholder—of the great North London Palace of Amusement.

All this is irrelevant, save that it explains why the manager produced his champagne, and why he gave his warnings to Frank in language so emphatic.

The family resumed the ordinary attire of humble British citizens, and Frank walked away with them. They lived in a small house, in one of those streets of gloomy small houses which abound in Islington. Patty nodded good-bye to him, and ran up the steps with her brother, opening the door with a latch key.

"Sir," said her father, when she had gone in, "you saved my daughter's life. What shall I say to thank you?"

"Nothing. Why do you let her do it?"

"We must live. There is nothing dishonest in it. There is not half the risk that you think about it. As for me, I feel almost as safe on the trapeze as you do on the pavement—and so does Patty, for that matter."

"But—but—" Frank hesitated.

"Immodest, you think it is. I don't know, sir—I don't know. There isn't a better girl than my girl in all London, and I defy you to find one. No, I had a great exercise of my conscience before I let her go—only her gifts were too strong. It was a-flying in the face of Providence not to let her take a way which was opened, so to speak, unto her. I laid the matter before my friend, Mr. Eddrup—"

"Eddrup! He that lives at Mrs. Skimp's in Granville-square?"

"There is only one Mr. Eddrup, young man. The Lord can't spare more than one at a time like him. Do you know him?"

"I live in the same house. Tell me about him."

"Ah, I think you had better find out about him. Well, I laid the matter before him, and he decided that if the girl liked, and I was always there to look after her, there would be no harm done. If you live in the same house as Mr. Eddrup, young gentleman, you try to talk to him. It was he that showed me the Light."

Frank stared.

"Before I knew Mr. Eddrup, I was clean gone astray, and out of the way altogether. Now, I'm a different man. So is Patty. Do you mean that Mr. Eddrup has never said a word in season to you?"

"Not yet. I've only been in the house two days."

"Then wait; or—if you are not one of those who go about scoffing and sneering at good men—come with me on Sunday evening. But you're a gentleman, Mr. Melliship. You go to the Establishment, I suppose."

Frank was too much astonished to find religion in an acrobat to answer.

"There is spiritual food of different kinds," Mr. Silver went on. "I can't get my nourishment in the Church of England. Mind you, I'm not saying a word against it. But I like freedom. I like to have my say if I've got anything to say, and when my heart is full."

"What denomination do you belong to?" asked Frank.

"To none, sir, at present. Why should I? Every man is a priest in his own house. I am of the religion of Abraham. First, I was a Plymouth Brethren; then I was a Primitive Methodists, then I was a Particular Baptists. I've tried the Huntingdon Connection, and the Independents, and the Wesleyans; but I don't like them. I don't like any of them. So I stay at home and read the Book; or else I go and hear Mr. Eddrup on Sunday nights."

"Let me come and talk to you," said Frank. "You shall tell me more about yourself, if you will. I promise, at least, not to scoff and sneer at good things."

"I'm an illiterate man, sir, and you are a gentleman, with education, and all that, I dare say. But come when you like."

"Let me come next Sunday evening. You shall

give me some tea," said Frank, in his lordly way, as if he were inviting himself to a man's rooms at college.

Mr. Silver looked after him with a puzzled expression, and went up the steps to dinner.

"A gentleman," he said to Patty, "who doesn't swear and use bad language: who doesn't look as if he got drunk; who doesn't go about with a big pipe in his mouth: who doesn't seem to mind talking about religious things. We don't get many such gentlemen at the Palace of Amusement, do us?"

"But, father," said Patty, laying the things out for dinner, "how does a gentleman come to be singing in the Palace? Gentlemen don't sing, do they, in public places for money?"

"I never heard of it. I will ask Mr. Eddrup. Here's dinner. Joey, say grace."

In these early days, Frank thought it best to go every morning to the Palace. This pleased Mr. Leweson, who had conceived an immense admiration for his new tenor. He showed this by solemnly presenting him with a tenor song of his own composing, which Frank sung, after the fourth night, in place of that song of the domestic affections already quoted. It was not so popular; but that, as Mr. Leweson remarked, was clear proof of its real worth. Had the loonatics applauded, he said he should have felt it his duty, as a musician, to put the song in the fire.

Sunday came, and Frank bethought him of his invitation to take tea with his new friends. Skimp's dined at four o'clock on Sundays. After dinner, Mrs. Skimp went to church, and her boarders chiefly amused themselves by playing at billiards. To the

younger portion, the students, there was something particularly attractive in playing a forbidden game on Sunday; to the older ones, the chance of picking up a few stray sixpences at pool was quite enough of itself to make them prefer knocking the balls about to smoking pipes all the evening. Besides, they could unite the two amusements. Captain Bowker went to church, to smoothe out his ideas, he said—though no one understood in the least what he meant. I think he liked the quiet of church, where he could abstract his mind from all affairs—spiritual as well as worldly—and compose his verses. Mr. Eddrup, as usual, appeared at dinner, ate in silence what was set before him, and disappeared noiselessly.

Frank found his friends waiting for him—Patty with an extra riband. Her father was sitting with a Bible before him—his one book, which he read at all times. On Sundays, when he had a clear day before him, he used to read the Prophecies, applying them to modern times, and working out all problems of the present by their light. He had no books to help him, unless Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell" be considered a help. Reading day after day, as he did, the words had come to have to him, as they have done to some theologians, a sort of threefold sense—the historic, the prophetic, and the hidden or inner sense. The pursuit of the last occupied all his thoughts.

The room was poorly furnished, for the family income was but small. Three or four chairs, a table, and a sideboard constituted the whole of it. No servant was apparent, and Patty and Joe were up and down the stairs, bringing up the tea things, laughing and chattering.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Melliship," said his host. "Now, I call this friendly. Patty, my dear, make haste up with the tea, because it's getting late."

"It's quite ready, father. We were only waiting for Mr. Melliship."

Watercresses, and bread and butter. Patty pouring out the tea. Her father with his finger on the Bible, enunciating things prophetic.

"I was reading what Ezekiel says about the world in our time, Mr. Melliship."

"Did Ezekiel write about our time?" asked Frank, thinking what a pity Patty's hands should be so spoiled by her acrobatic work.

"All time—every time. I can read, sir, the events of to-day and to-morrow in his pages, as plain as I can in a newspaper. I can tell you, if you like to listen, what is going to happen in the world before you die."

"Tell me," said Frank.

Mr. Silver held up his finger, and began. As he went on, in short jerky sentences, his eyes wandered from Frank's and fixed themselves in space—the gaze becoming deeper, and the expression as of one who reads things far off.

"A day of judgment and lamentation, when even the righteous shall be sifted. Afterwards the good time. A day of gathering of the nations upon the earth. The Great Battle—the Final Battle—shall be fought, after which there shall be no more wars. The Lord's battle will be fought on the Lord's battle-field, the Plain of Esdraelon; the battle of the people against the priests, and all their power. After it, the priests shall clothe themselves with trembling as with a garment. Know," he continued after a pause,

stretching his hand across the table, and still with his eyes fixed in vacancy—"know that, from time long gone by, even from the days of the Chaldæan who first invented the accursed thing, the arm of the Lord has been against the priesthood. There is one nation the enemy of the human race—the nation of the priests. Whether they call themselves Catholic, or Anglican, or Dissenting, or Heathen, the spirit is alike. It is the spirit of darkness and tyranny."

"Mr. Melliship, is your tea to your liking?" whispered Patty.

"It is the spirit of pride and falsehood. Every dogma that blindfolds men's eyes is the invention of a priest; every accursed form of domination is the invention of the priests; every evil government has been maintained by the priests. They have made the world what it is; they have substituted fear for love; they keep the people ignorant, they darken counsel, and shut out light."

"Joey, run up and fetch my bonnet," said Patty.

"Then you want to abolish all priests?" said Frank, looking with wonder at the religious enthusiast.

"I am on the Lord's side," he replied, simply. "I would that I might live to fight in the Great Battle when it comes, and to fight against the priests. Priests! I am a priest. We are all priests;—every man in his own house, as the Patriarchs were before us. Remember, young man, that this is no light matter. It will be your place to take a side—and that before long. Russia is advancing south, as Ezekiel prophesied. Turkey is falling to pieces, and will soon be even as she who was once decked with ornaments—with bracelets on her hands and a chain upon

her neck—who went astray and was confounded, as Ezekiel prophesied. All things came from Palestine: all things go back to Palestine. They are going to make a railway down the valley of the Euphrates: then they will rebuild the city of Babylon. In the time to come, that shall be the city of wealth and trade—when London will be deserted. The city of the Lord shall then be rebuilt, too: even the city of David, with a Temple which shall have no priests. It shall be the reign of peace. All nations shall come into the Church, and the millennium shall be begun. Even so, O Lord: Thy will be done!”

He folded his hands, as he concluded his speech, in a silent prayer.

“Drink your tea, father,” said Patty; “it’s getting cold—and it’s late, besides.”

“Where are we going, Miss Silver?” asked Frank.

“Miss Silver!” Patty laughed merrily. “I never was called Miss Silver in my life before. Call me Patty, Mr. Melliship.”

“I will, if you will call me Frank.”

“Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind. You are a gentleman, and don’t belong to our rank of life. Hush, don’t move. Don’t disturb father. He’s often so, after talking about the Bible.”

The enthusiast was bent forward, with his eyes fixed, gazing out of the window. He neither heard nor saw—he was in a trance. Frank looked at him anxiously. Then, moved by the impulse of his artistic nature, he took a book from the table. It was Patty’s hymn-book—and on the fly-leaf began to sketch her father with his pencil. Patty looked over his shoulder in speechless admiration. In three minutes it was

done—a rude, rough sketch, slightly idealized, so as to bring out the noble ruggedness of the man's brow, the wild depth of his eyes, the setting of his lips.

"Oh! it's wonderful," Patty whispered.

"Shall I draw you?" asked Frank, in a whisper. "Sit down, and I will try."

She sat down, blushing; but the next minute sprang up again, whispering—

"Not to-day—not while father is like that. Don't speak."

She took the Bible from him, and looked at the portrait with devouring eyes. Some subtle beauty the artist had put into the lines which she had never noticed before in her father's face, and saw it now for the first time.

They sat for two or three minutes more in silence, and then Mr. Silver threw his head back with a sigh, and looked round the room.

"It is late," he said. "Let us go."

"But where are we going?" asked Frank again.

"Why, to Mr. Eddrup's church, of course."

He followed in astonishment. Who and what was this Mr. Eddrup, that these people should so look up to him?

Patty and he walked together.

"I shall show the picture to father," she said—"but not to-night: not till the fit is off him. I suppose you were surprised to find us in such a nice house? We couldn't afford to rent it, you know; but it's Mr. Leweson's, and he gives it to us for nothing. We sometimes let lodgings, only I don't know—it is such a trouble."

"You had better again," said Frank. "I will be your lodger."

"Ah! I don't know. I should like it, you know," she replied, simply; "but father's particular. You might turn out bad, after all. And then see where we should be!"

"Well—I haven't turned out very good, so far," said Frank, with a sigh.

"Here we are at the church," said Patty, stopping at a door.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STAIRCASE, steep as a ladder, led to a long low room, filled with people. It might have held about eighty, because audiences of all kinds, whether for religion or amusement, pack closely. The windows were open, because the night was close. The room was lighted by two or three gas-jets, and fitted up with benches for the body of the room, and a foot-high platform for the end. This was garnished with a rough hand-rail, not for any separation of the minister from the people, but for a leaning-place on which he might rest his hands. Two or three chairs were on the platform. One of these was empty. Mr. Silver, leaving Frank in the hands of his daughter, went to the end, and took the vacant seat with a slight but noticeable air of pride. The only arm chair was occupied by Mr. Eddrup, who was leaning his head on his hands, motionless.

The people were the common people of the neighbourhood: rough, coarse men, and rough, coarse women. They all knew each other, and occasionally telegraphed

salutes with friendly grins. A few carried babies; but there were very few children present, and those only so small as not to be able to take care of themselves. They whispered a good deal to each other, but in a hushed, serious way. Laughter and levity there were none.

The worshippers in this humble Ebenezer were called, as Frank afterwards discovered, the Primitive Blueskins, by the scoffers in the neighbourhood. The reason, as told to him was a queer story, which may or may not be true. It told how forty years ago, before Mr. Eddrup went to the place, there had been an attempt—a very little one—to promote in the court some form of Christian worship. This room, the same in which they always met, had been fixed upon as the only room available. It was old and shaky, and it was built over a dyeing establishment. One cold winter night, soon after they had formed themselves into a congregation, the reverend gentleman who conducted their exercises, whether driven by religious zeal or impelled by the severity of the weather, enforced his arguments by an unwonted physical activity, stamping, gesticulating, and even jumping. He calculated *nimum credulus*, on the strength of the floor. Alas! it gave way. The boards broke beneath the unaccustomed strain. The table, on which were two candles, was upset; and, amid the darkness, the little flock could hear only the groans of their pastor and the splashing of liquid. The last flash of the overturning lights had shown him vanishing through the flooring. They turned and fled. It was some time before they ventured to return. But they found their minister blue. He was dyed: he had fallen into the

vat prepared for an indigo day. Besides this, he was half frozen. After this the congregation dispersed. Nor was it till Mr. Eddrup came that they reassembled; and when they did, the nickname stuck to them still.

Patty pulled Frank by the arm, and they humbly took the lowest places of all, the very last, with their backs against the wall.

"It's going to begin directly," whispered the girl. "You must look over my hymn-book. There's Mr. Eddrup."

As she spoke, the old man rose and advanced to the front of the platform, grasping the rail.

"If any have aught to say"—he spoke a kind of formula—"let him or her now say it."

A labouring man rose up, and incoherently delivered himself of a few short and unconnected sentences. Then he sat down, perspiring. He had an idea which he wanted to set forth, but language was too strong for him, and he had failed.

Mr. Eddrup looked round again. No one else spoke. Then he took a hymn-book, and gave out a number. They took their hymns, like their tea, sitting; but sang with none the less fervour.

Then their leader—for such Mr. Eddrup was—rose to address them, with his hands on the rail, his head held down, and his white hair falling forward in a long mass that almost hid his face.

"Into what queer world have I dropped?" thought Frank. "A religious trapeze family; a man who lives at Skimp's, and preaches to people; I myself, who sing at a music hall, and come here on Sundays. It all seems very irregular."

Mr. Eddrup, still looking on the ground, with his long, white hair hanging about him, began his discourse in a slow, hesitating way, as if he was feeling, not for ideas, but for fitting words to put them in. Presently he warmed a little with his subject, and lifting his head, spoke in clearer and fuller tones. His audience went with him, devouring every word he said. They were wise words. He spoke of the everyday life of a religious man, of the temptations that beset the poor, of the strength which comes of resistance. He had that native eloquence which comes of earnestness. He wished to say the right thing in the most forcible way. So, when he had found the right thing, he took the simplest words that lay to his hand, and the readiest illustration. Socrates did the same. A higher than Socrates did the same. He talked to them for two hours. During all that time, not a soul stirred. All eyes were fixed upon the speaker. There was no interruption, save now and again when a woman sobbed. It was not that he told them the hackneyed things that preachers love to dwell upon—the general phrases, the emotional doctrines; all these Mr. Eddrup passed by. He told them unpalatable things: little things: things which are a perpetual hindrance to the progress of the soul, which yet seem to have nothing to do with the soul. He laid down directions for them which showed that he knew exactly all their circumstances. He showed them how religion is a flower that grows upon all soils alike, nourished by the same sun which shines upon rich and poor. And, lastly—in a peroration which made the ears of those that heard it to tingle—he proclaimed the infinite love of the Creator. He stopped suddenly, sat down, and was silent.

They sang a hymn, and the people went away.

"Tell me the meaning of it," asked Frank of Patty.
"Who and what is Mr. Eddrup?"

"Come away, and I will tell you. Father likes to have a chat with him of a Sunday night. Come Joey. He came here," said Patty, "forty years ago and more. He was a young man, I've been told, and strong; but he was always very sad and silent. He began by searching out—always in this court—the poor children, and getting them to school in the morning. He taught it himself, and gave them bread and tea for breakfast. People liked that, you know, and the children liked it. Then he got to having the men to evening school at eight o'clock. A few of them went. The court was the most awful place, I've been told, in all London. Mr. Eddrup was robbed a dozen times going away at night—beaten, too, and ill-treated. But he always came again next day, just as if nothing had happened. They do say that nothing would make him prosecute a thief. So when the boys found there was no danger and no fun in stealing his handkerchief or knocking him down, of course they left off. Well, so it went on, you see. Gradually the court got better. Mr. Eddrup got the houses into his own hands by degrees—because he's a very well-to-do man, you know—and made them clean. They were pigsties before. He never turned anybody out; never sold up their sticks for rent; always waited and waited—and, they say, he always gets paid."

"Has he turned the people into angels, then?"

"No. I don't say that. But they're better than the run of people. He has made them a religious lot which was the most dreadful lot in all London. Parsons come here now, and want the people to go to

church. Not they. So long as Mr. Eddrup preaches in the little chapel, there they go."

"All this must cost him money as well as time."

"He spends all he's got, whatever that may be, Mr. Melliship, on the poor. I've been told that he never takes anything stronger than water, and has only one room to himself, all to have more for the poor people."

"Some of that is true, I know," said Frank.

"Oh! those flowers," cried Patty, as they passed a flower-girl. "How sweet they smell!"

"Let me give you some," said Frank.

Now, Patty had never had any flowers given her before. It was a new sensation that a man—or anybody, indeed—should pay her attentions. She went home with her present, and put the flowers in water. If Frank had been able to see how carefully those poor flowers were watered, and how long they lasted! It will be understood at once that Patty's stage career had been very different to that of most young ladies of her profession. Always with her father, taken by him to the theatre, brought home by him, she was as domestic a little bird as any in all this great wilderness of houses.

"Poor Patty!" thought Frank as he walked home. "A dreary life for her to risk her life every night for so many shillings or pounds a week; to have no lovers, like other girls; no pleasure but to go and hear Mr. Eddrup preach."

Mr. Eddrup had returned when he reached home, and was sitting, silent as usual, in the drawing-room with Captain Bowker—who had his long pipe alight, and his glass of rum and water before him.

"You were there to-night," said the old preacher. "The Silvers brought you."

"They did," said Frank. "Thank you very much."

Captain Bowker smoked on. He was in a meditative mood.

"I went once," he said, "myself. Should have gone again, but I saw one of my last old crew there. Couldn't go and sit on the same bench with him, you know. Stations must be observed. Mr. Melliship, it's just as well to say that Mr. Eddrup here doesn't care to have his Sunday evening's occupation known."

"Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame," said Frank.

"No, Mr. Melliship—no," replied the old man, sadly. "There has never been a time when I have not been beset by temptation to be proud of a trifling piece of work like mine. I should like to be famous, if only in the smallest way. But I pray against it. I formed the resolution, very long ago, that there was only one course for me in life—to go through it as noiselessly as I could, to do as little mischief as possible, to resent no injury."

"But why?" asked Frank. "Why?"

"Some day I will tell you, perhaps. Not now. I am glad you came to hear me talk to my people, Mr. Melliship. It is a long time since we have had a—anybody but my own people. It does them good to see strangers. Let me look at your face, sir."

Frank held his face, smiling, to the light, while the old man walked feebly—Frank noticed how very feeble he was after his exertions in the chapel—to the chair where he sat, and looked at him steadily.

"There is the seal of innocence, and the seal of

guilt. This is the seal of innocence. Keep it, young man. Look at mine. Do you see nothing?"

"Nothing," said Frank.

Mr. Eddrup sighed, and sat down again. A few minutes afterwards he stole out of the room, and slipped upstairs to bed.

"He's often like that," said Captain Bowker. "Something on his mind. I had a cook aboard the *Merry Moonshine* once, used to sit all day long, and never speak to a soul. Took a fancy to a Lascar, and would sometimes talk to him. No one else, mind. One day he up with the chopper, and buried it three inches in the Lascar's head. Then, before you could say Jack Robinson, over he went—ship going ten knots. Lascar dead in a minute. *Mr. Eddrup's took a fancy to you!*"

"That's a cheerful sort of story to tell. Do you think Mr. Eddrup may be tempted to do something rash with the carving-knife?"

"I can't say," said the Captain solemnly. "No one can say what another man will do, or what terrible thing may happen to him. I've been married myself."

"Then you may be married again."

"Lord forbid! There's ghosts again. I suppose you never saw a ghost?"

"Never."

"Nor more did I. But I've *felt* one, young man. I've been beat black and blue by a ghost. Rum thing, that was."

"Tell it me."

"There it is, you see. You get making me sit up spinning my yarns when I ought to be in my berth. Sunday night, too. Well, I'll tell you this one. It was forty years ago. I was a midshipman aboard an East

Indiaman. We'd had bad weather, and put into Port Louis to refit;—for the matter of that, we always put in there in the good old days. I was ashore with two or three more, drinking, as boys will, in the verandah of an hotel there. There was a chap, an Englishman, with a solemn face and a long nose, got talking to us. I remember his hatchet jaws now. Presently he whispers across the little table—

“‘I want two or three plucky fellows. Will you come?’

“‘What for?’ we asked him.

“‘Money,’ says he. ‘Treasure.’

“‘Do you know where it is?’ I said.

“‘I do,’ says he.

“‘Then why don’t you get it yourself?’ says I.

“That seemed to fix him a bit. Then he says—

“‘Because I can’t do it alone, and I won’t trust anybody but English sailors. It’s money buried by the pirates up in the hillside over there. I know the exact spot. There is a story going about that the place is haunted; but we ain’t afraid of ghosts, I *should* hope.’

“We agreed for next night, if we could get leave, and went aboard again. All that day and the next we were talking it over. The mate heard us. He came up to me laughing—

“‘So you’re not afraid of ghosts, are you?’

“However, we got our leave, and went ashore. The mate went too.

“It’s dark in those latitudes between six and seven, and at that time we met our long-nosed friend. He had got pickaxes and a lantern, and led the way. There were four of us altogether. We had to pick

our way, when we left the path, over stones and through bushes; and, what was very odd, I kept on thinking I heard steps behind us. Being only a slip of a boy, I begins to get nervous. Presently our guide stopped.

“‘Here we are,’ he says; and, pointing to a place under a tree, he hangs up the lantern, and takes off his coat and began to dig. ‘Now boys,’ he says, ‘as quick as you can.’

“‘We fell to with a will. It was a precious hot night, and the ground was hard; but we made a hole in it after a bit, and then at it tooth and nail. Five minutes after we began, I looked up to straighten my back, and found the lantern gone.

“‘Who’s unshipped the light?’ I says.

“‘We all looked round. There was a young moon to give us a little light, but no lantern. I, for one, felt queer. However, we all went on again without saying a word. We got a hole two foot deep, and were all in it. Then one of my mates wants to know how long the job’s going to last.

“‘Perhaps,’ he says, ‘the ghosts have sunk it fifty fathoms deep.’

“‘Ghosts be d——d,’ said lantern jaws. ‘Dig away, boys.’

“‘Then we heard a laugh close by us.

“‘Ho!—ho!—ho!’

“‘It was a curious place for echoes among the rocks, and the laugh went ringing round and round till you thought it was never going to stop. We all stopped for a bit.

“‘Go on,’ says our leader. ‘They can’t do more than laugh.’

"With that another laugh, louder than the first. However, we went on. Then I heard steps; and looking up, I saw three or four figures over the hole.

"'Lord!' I cried. 'Here's the ghosts.'

"Well, I hadn't hardly time to sing out, when whack, whack came half a dozen sticks on our heads and backs, and we all tumbled together. I suppose the sticks went at us for five minutes in all. When they stopped, I got up the first, grabbed my jacket, hanging on the tree, and legged it, tumbling over the rocks, and scratching myself in the bushes, as fast as ever mortal man ran in his life. The rest all came after me. What became of mealy face, I don't know. P'raps the ghosts finished him off.

"Half an hour after we got to the port, the mate came up with three friends. They were all laughing at some joke of theirs.

"'Well, my lads,' says he, 'did you see any ghosts?'

"No one answered, and they all laughed louder.

"The oddest thing of all, Mr. Melliship," concluded Captain Bowker, laying his pipe-stem impressively on Frank's hand, "was that next morning my cap, which I had left behind in the hole, was found in the boat. Now, *how did that get there?*"

CHAPTER IX.

A WORD about Parkside, where Grace Heathcote sat waiting and hoping. It is the way of things. A man works and hopes, and is sure to be disappointed. A woman waits and hopes, generally getting disappointed too.

Dull enough it was, and quiet, unless when Cousin

Dick was with them. The Heathcote girls were—by right of education—not of position—something better than the commonplace young ladies of the quiet market town. They saw little of them, and made few friends. Moreover, they were five miles away from Market Basing, so that they were practically thrown upon their own resources. That meant that they talked, and made each other unhappy. This, I believe, is not uncommon in English households—that sweet domesticity on which we pride ourselves covering an infinite amount of petty miseries, tiny bullyings, naggings, and prickings with tongues as sharp as needles. Sister against sister—mother against daughter. They love each other fondly, of course, because they are always supposed to love each other: domestic affection being as necessary in modern life as a shirt to one's back. Unfortunately, the love which reigns in the dear home life does not always bring with it that tenderness for each other's sensitive points which keeps out of the house ill-humours and sour tempers. The lower classes of England—I do not mean the very lowest—are much superior to the middle classes in this respect. I have found out the reason why. They don't sit at home so much. In London, they are always going to the theatre, which is almost the only amusement for the class who frequent the pit, and are not above the gallery. In the country, they go out and about as much as they can.

Now, Grace Heathcote had a large share not only of fidelity, but of obstinacy, which she inherited from her father. A woman's fidelity is very often like one of those plants which flourish best covered up and hidden. Grace's prospered best openly—in the

sunshine—and was able to grow and flourish even against the east winds of her mother's opposition. To her, Frank was a hero. It seemed noble in him to go away into a sort of hiding—working, as she imagined, to pay off his father's liabilities, and hoping to come back after many months to claim her promised hand. This she thought, and this she said when, as happened not infrequently, her mother turned the talk upon Frank.

To Lydia Heathcote, Frank seemed as a fool. And she said so. For she was determined on one thing: her daughter should marry Dick Mortiboy. She saw that Grace attracted him. She was sure—for she meant well by her daughter—that he would make a good husband. She wanted to secure all that money of his for her own children. She was wise as well as determined. She knew that as the constant dropping of water wears away the hardest rock, so the constant insinuations of distrust and suspicion wear away the fondest woman's trust. Therefore she talked a good deal about Frank; repeated and reiterated her grief that he was doing so badly, as she assumed; pointed out how foolish it was to go away from his friends, and those who would help him to a decent position; hinted that it would be so much better if he were to emigrate, and follow the example of his cousin Dick; never failed to shed tears over the enumeration of dear Dick's many virtues, as contrasted with the failings and weaknesses of Frank; and always ended by reproachfully sighing over her daughter, as over one who trifles with a good man's love.

“But, mamma, Frank will get on, I'm sure. Kate said in her letter she knew he was doing well. He is

very clever. He can paint beautifully; and it was only the other evening, at the rectory, that Mr. Nelson said artists were just as well off as any other professional men, and as well thought of. If he likes painting better than anything else, and sees his way to get on, why should he not be an artist?"

"Nonsense, child," was her mother's answer to Grace's special pleading. And then Mrs. Heathcote explained, for the hundredth time, the reasons why Frank could never, by any possibility, be in a position to marry. "Besides, if Kate knows he is doing very well in London, it is a strange thing they don't know where he lives. You know, your father would write to him if he knew where to find him. But we couldn't even give Dick his address before he went to town. Such a want of respectability about having no address! It's no use, Grace; I know perfectly well that the boy is doing no good for himself, else why not let his friends know his address?"

"I am not going to listen," said Grace, indignantly, "to things like that. You have no right to say such things of Frank."

"There—there, Grace, do be reasonable. It is all for your own good that I speak. If your own mother does not know the world, who should? Why, before I married your father, there were two or three people I fancied. Young Spriggs, the brewer, who failed for thirty thousand pounds, and cut his throat—I might have had him. Mr. Potterton, of Wyncote—he's got an asthma now: you can hear him a mile off, poor man. And old Mr. Humbledum, who died of drink last week—why, people used to talk about us. That

was before I met your father. And look at Dick—poor Dick!—head over ears in love with you.”

“To begin with, he is nothing of the sort. And if he were, it would be nothing to me.”

“I can see it, girl,” said Mrs. Heathcote, wisely nodding her head. “I’ve seen it for months now. I think it is—I suppose it doesn’t matter what I think—cruel of you never to give him the slightest civility. Poor fellow, you might be even polite to him when he comes.”

Grace beat a tattoo on the carpet with her foot, but said nothing.

“I only hope he does not notice it so much as I do. I’ve no patience with your father; he’s as easy as an old shoe about things. If he’d told you to give Frank up when they left—”

“Mamma!” cried Grace, her cheek reddening and her eye flashing brightly. Mrs. Heathcote was a little afraid of her daughter when she looked like that. She saw she had gone a little too far—not for the first time. “Mamma, how dare you——”

The door opened and Mr. Heathcote came into the room. Grace fell into his arms, and with her head on his shoulder, sobbed like a child. She would not have broken out if they had remained alone.

“Lydia,” said Mr. Heathcote angrily, “what have you been saying to Grace? Never mind, my child—never mind.”

“Really, John,” said his wife, “you and Grace together are enough to wear out the patience of Job,” and she swept out of the room.

And so on. Scenes that happened not once, but often. And with each one Grace became obstinate,

and her mother more irritating. Lucy was made unhappy. The farmer was made unhappy: that was nothing. Civil war raged in Parkside Farm, and the contest was maintained on terms of perfect equality, in which Grace, shielded by a stubborn resolution, received all her mother's blows, and only occasionally retaliated with words which had more of sharpness than of filial piety. Dick brought peace for the time, and there was renewed war when he was gone.

A truce was held on a tacit understanding, while Mrs. Heathcote tried to play off Lucy on Dick. This was, however, quite hopeless. First, Dick did not like women to be gentle and soft. He liked a girl with a fine high temper of her own, and a will, like Grace; and, secondly, Lucy did not like Dick so much as Grace did. From her constant visits to old Ready-money, she found out, by the old man's frowns when Dick came to see him, that there was something he had done. Of course, she knew nothing positive; but she had strong suspicions that all was not quite right between the father and the son. Her frequent absences in Derngate made matters even worse for Grace.

As for moving Farmer John out of his jog-trot ways, nothing could do that. He was quite ready to help Frank with money or counsel—for the Heathcotes were very well-to-do; but he was not going to put himself out of the way, and hunt him up. Let Frank come to him. Frank did not go to him: made no sign; and Grace's heart began to fail her.

Village affairs lost their interest. The rheumatics of the old women found her callous: their complaints fell on cold ears. She went through the daily routine of her small duties without interest. When her mother,

the day's business finished, about ten or eleven—they breakfasted at eight—took her seat for the day, she tried to escape to her own room, or to the garden. She could sometimes—when Silly Billy could be spared to blow the organ—take refuge in the church. Her mother disliked music in the morning, so she could not play. Her pony was lame, and she could not ride. Mrs. Heathcote never drove out, except to town: like most country ladies, thinking very little of the lovely foliage and shady lanes of her own shire.

Sometimes one of the Battiscombe girls stayed with them—then they played croquet in the afternoon; Lord Launton very often finding something to say to Mr. Heathcote, which made it quite natural for him to stop and play with them till the dressing-bell rang at the Towers. It was curious that he found business which brought him to Parkside three or four times a week. He came in on any pretext, always about the same time—croquet time; stayed as long as he could, and almost forgot his shyness. Dick Mortiboy at first made him shrink into his shell; but he managed to creep out again gradually, and came to like him. Dick took a fancy to the shy young fellow: talked to him; told him stories—Dick always had the readiest perception of what kind of story would suit his listener: this was one great secret of his popularity—and pleased the viscount by not deferring to him in the slightest degree because he was a lord.

So life went on;—Grace sad and unhappy; her mother angry and disappointed; all playing at cross-purposes—as we always do; all acting a part to the world—as we always do; all putting a good face on things—as of course we must. And do not quarrel

with Grace when you read her letters to Kate, because they seem bright and happy. I knew a man once who wrote the brightest, gayest, happiest letter—full of mirth and fun, and good spirits—a quarter of an hour before he blew out his brains. Letters mean nothing, except that they are sometimes a natural relief to the heart, and the effort of pleasing a friend gives you good spirits in spite of yourself.

CHAPTER X.

“I MUST send you a piece of news, dearest Kate,” wrote Grace, “before coming to what I have really to say;—that is, my letter is to be a woman’s letter, with all the important part at the end. The news is, that Dick met Frank last week in London. The account of him is pretty good—for Dick, that is, who is a better story-teller than historian. That sounds like nonsense; but what I mean is, that he tells capital stories so long as he is allowed to draw upon the boundless fields of his own imagination, and keep to Texas; but when one wants exact descriptions of what really took place, one finds him sometimes a careless observer. This is a fault, perhaps, common with your great geniuses. For my own part, I never invented anything in all my life—and how people can write novels, goodness only knows!—but I can always manage to tell exactly what I saw. The feminine eye, my dear, has a remarkable power of taking in everything at a glance. I am sure you will own that no man ever yet was born—not even Robert Houdin—who could pass a woman in the street and be able to tell afterwards everything

she had on, from top to toe, and what it cost. You and I can do it, easily. That was just what I wanted to know about Frank. 'Tell me,' I said, 'what he looked like, and how he was dressed.' Well, you know, Dick was with him for eight long hours, and he can't tell me. He doesn't even know whether he wore gloves. He met Frank somewhere, and they went together to the University cricket match. After that they went and dined together of course—one cannot imagine men meeting without dining together. I begin to think that there must be some secret religious worship, a kind of stomachic Freemasonry, connected with dinners; or else that eating, with men, has a poetry about it which it fails to have for us. To-day, for instance, we had roast veal for dinner; but I am as prosaic after it as if it had been cold mutton. They dined together, Kate, and then they talked and smoked all the evening. Finally, Frank went away, half promising to call on Dick in the morning. *He never came.* All these details, I dare say, you know from Frank himself. What I wanted to learn exactly was how he looked, and if he was dressed properly; because I have often read in books that dress is a good rough test of prosperity, and if a man is doing well he always has a good pair of boots and a good coat. Don't be deceived by a bad hat, because the richest men sometimes have a bad hat. Poor Uncle Richard's hat was always really beyond everything. When a man begins to go downhill, it shows itself first in the heels of his boots, and next in his trousers. You would hardly believe that Dick—the man I believed so clever—never noticed Frank's boots at all. I made Lucy ask him the question, because I had asked after all the rest of

his apparel, and Dick might have thought me inquisitive.

“‘Boots?’ asked Dick. ‘I never looked at his boots.’

“And yet he calls himself an observant man!

“My dear Kate, I am so happy to have seen some one who has actually seen Frank, that I write all manner of nonsense. He was looking very well indeed, Dick declares. He was happy—had a pleasant day. Dick did hint at some sort of fight; but that must be an allegorical way of describing a pleasant day. Just like the Americans, when they go to see a great sight, say they are going to see the elephant, so my cousin, Dick Mortiboy, when he wishes to convey the idea of perfect happiness, says he has had a fight. That is my theory, because I cannot believe that men can possibly feel any pleasure in banging each other about. Frank gave a happy and cheerful account of himself. Dick thinks that he is making money by art: or, at all events—because we hardly expect him to make money—that he is gradually getting work, and making a success for himself. The career of a man! Is it possible to be too ambitious? Lucy thinks that ambition means selfishness. She says that a man ought to follow what she calls the straight line of duty—look neither to right nor left, and be careless whether people praise him or not. I try to persuade her that all men are not clergymen. I like to have my clergyman really pious and disinterested—I suppose, because one never gets that kind of clergyman—just as I should like to have all sorts of impossible things in sealskin. A man—fancy, a Man!—came down here last winter with a long sealskin coat—real sealkin, mind—worth at least a hundred pounds. Now, that I call a wasting of good

things. But about ambition. What I should like would be to see my husband distinguished: first in everything; people looking after him; pictures of him in the shop windows; a portrait of him in the *Illustrated*; biographies of him; cartoons, and even caricatures, of him. This is my ambition for myself. I should be plain Mrs.—; it's bad luck to write your married name before you are married—look after his house, see that his dinner was always exactly what he liked, and endeavour to find out what it is that men admire so much in different kinds of wine. Tell me you agree with me, Kate. But for a man not to be ambitious! If I had a husband not ambitious of doing something—of being first in his own circle, even—I would stick pins in him till he was. Would not you? But Lucy, the dear child, has no ideas that are not founded on what poor Aunt Susan used to tell her. Aunt Susan! What would she have thought of her nephew Dick? She was always talking to Lucy about him—always saying that she knew he was not dead—always praying for him—always telling of his good heart. How proud she would have been of him!

“Yes, Kate—Frank is well and happy. Of course he tells you he is; but it is really true—because Dick, who is unobservant about boots, would not be deceived in this. He laughs; he eats and drinks; he is well dressed; he is too proud to take any assistance; he is getting on in his profession; and, without telling Dick anything, he asked after me ten times. Ten times, Kate! Always my own Frank—with the same bright face, and the same cheery voice. And now I know this, I've got an answer always ready, in case of little domestic storms, which you may guess.

“And now for the real thing in my letter. Kate, you are very wicked! You dare to make great successes, and to say nothing. You presume on our country ignorance. You knew that I should not go to town this season at all. You were afraid, perhaps, in your pride, that Dick would buy your picture: you were even too proud to have it exhibited in your own name. My dear, I am proud of you. Frank told Dick, who didn’t think much about it—such is his Californian ignorance!—and casually told papa, who didn’t think much about it, because his lines have not been cast much among picture galleries. He casually told me. I jumped—I did, indeed. A picture in the Royal Academy! Actually accepted, and hung in a good place, and sold! O Kate! how proud you ought to be! And never to have told me a word about it. Working away in your little Welsh village in silence, without a soul to speak to; sending up your picture in a name that prevented the committee from knowing whether it was a man or a woman! Of course, if they had known your sex, they would have rejected you with ignominy, in pursuance of their grand plan of keeping Us down. My dear Kate, it was sublime. Now the Academy is all over and done, and we have not even seen the picture. If we had known, of course we should have all gone to town—mamma, and Lucy, and myself, and Cousin Dick, to see it. Dear Kate, I am so glad, so very glad! It must be the best consolation you have had since your troubles. Write and tell me you are happy about it; and, *please*, don’t keep secrets from me. I will guard your secrets so faithfully that not a soul shall know there is a secret. Tell me all your plans.

"Parkside is the same as ever. Somehow, we see more of Lord Launton than we used to. I wish he would not come in so often; for though he is very pleasant and all that, it is rather embarrassing if people come and find him there. We are partly his father's tenants, of course; but that is not a reason why he should come and play croquet with us. Then, we are not in a position to be invited to the Towers; and though he does not mean to be condescending, it is in some respects desirable, as mamma says, that he should not come. The worst of it is that we treat him, Lucy and I, as such an old friend, that we really do not take any notice of him, and quite ignore the fact that he is a real viscount. The other day, the Battiscombe girls were here. We had croquet, Cousin Dick, music, and a little dance. Lord Launton came in by chance, and stayed with us. They—I mean the girls—were immensely jealous of us; and, I have not the least doubt, hate us both for being intimate with him. I am reminded of our gardener—you know him? I saw him one day last autumn, standing for two hours together admiring his chrysanthemums. Then I went out to him, because I thought he might catch cold. He waved an admiring hand at the flowers.

"'Bless you, miss,' he said in the grandest way, as if that was nothing to what he could do if he brought his mind to bear on it, 'I take no manner of pride in them.'

"That is what I say to Lucy about Lord Launton. Is it not rather humiliating to us that the earl allows him to come here so often? You see, he thinks that we are good, worthy people; and that papa, in whom he has the good sense to believe, is a most excellent

person; and that we are all so deeply flattered by a visit from his son, that it is kindness to let him come as often as ever he likes. For my own part, I am going to take an early opportunity of speaking to Lord Launton seriously.

"I think Dick is recovering the ground he lost by his dreadful speech at the children's feast. The rector, good man, looks on him with eyes of suspicion, and so do the curates; but the people have taken his advice very much to heart; and, I believe, several *pères de famille* are seriously contemplating the desirability of sending their sons away. They go down, and consult Mr. Mortiboy at the bank. Dick gets a lot of maps, and points out where they can emigrate to, and what it will cost. He never fails to lecture them on the folly of trying to make their sons 'gentlemen,' as they call it—that is, to put them into banks and lawyers' offices, so that they may wear a black coat. He still continues his unrighteous practice of giving weekly doles to old women. I think Mr. Ghrimes instigates him to this. He tells us that he has dissolved partnership with his old friend, who has got all his Mexican estates. Those estates abroad do not seem to have weighed very much on his mind; and he confessed to me once that they were only valuable when a man of energy—meaning himself—was on the spot to superintend them. He showed me on the map where they were: put his thumb down—you know he has got an enormous thumb—and it covered a quarter of Mexico, about a hundred thousand square miles.

"'There,' he said—'my estates are exactly there.'

"'Thank you, Dick,' I said. 'I am very much wiser than I was before.'

"Then he laughed, and began to talk about something else.

"Whenever I write to you, I tell about Dick. I do not know how it is, except that he really does occupy our minds and our talk a good deal. What he did last, what he is going to do next, if he has committed any outrage on the church or conventionalities in general—this is chiefly what we talk about. I like him better every day. I think he is getting softened, and more companionable. He has left off the use of strange expressions in unknown languages. He has begun to dress more like an ordinary Christian. He falls in with our ways and habits of thought. In time, I hope we shall make him a steady, respectable member of society. What I try to teach him is, that we may be altogether wrong, but that we are all wrong together—only the division of a word, you see—and it is very disagreeable not to be like other people. We had a talk the other day about things.

"‘You go to church because it is respectable,’ he said.

"‘Well, and what if we do? Going to church is good for people. If the well-to-do people did not go, the poor would not. And without church, they would have no weekly lesson in good manners, to say nothing of higher things.’

"‘You subscribe a million a year to convert the niggers. You send out people you call missionaries, who live in comfortable houses, and bully and bribe the natives. I’ve seen them.’

"‘Of course, if you’ve seen them bullying and bribing the natives, I can say nothing. There you have an advantage over us.’

“‘All the time, you’ve got all your paupers at home starving, and going from bad to worse.’

“What are we to do, Dick? People give because they think it is right. The missionaries may be bad men, but the object is good. The societies may be badly managed, but their aim is a good one.’

“‘Your charities make the people paupers; your Church helps to make them hypocrites; your poor laws make them slaves; your trading interests grind them into the dust.’

“‘My dear cousin,’ I said, ‘don’t say *your* in such a personal way. I really should be very glad if things were better. Tell me what I am to do. As for you—you have wealth; you, at least, can do something.’

“‘I intend to,’ he said. ‘I am going to look about for a while, and then I shall start something.’

“Oh, Kate, that ‘something’! When Dick appears in his character of social reformer, introducing his ‘something,’ I tremble for all our notions. His ideas of society are primitive and radical. Only, as he tells papa, he can’t do any harm, because not five per cent. have got the pluck to think for themselves.

“I run on when I write to you, till I hardly know when to stop. I tell you everything. Don’t you think people exchange their ideas and show their hearts better on paper than in words? I sit in my own room alone, after dinner, and write like this, till I have exhausted everything that was in my head. I wonder if you really like to read my letters. Then I sit back and read it all over again, and try to ascertain, by a calm, critical perusal, whether it is worth reading. Sometimes I say—‘Kate will laugh at this;’ ‘This is

well put, young woman;' and so on—like a friendly critic, just to encourage myself.

* * * * *

"I have just read the whole letter through again. Kate, it is much too full of Cousin Dick. That is not my fault: it is the fault of his being always here. It is also much too full of myself. It is I, I, I—all *I*s, like the prophet's creature, that he saw in his vision. I must correct this fault in my next, and make it all U, U, U, in compensation, like a churchyard orchard. You know, Kate, I should like to make it all F, F, F—ective. Ah, me! if it were not for hope I should die. Suppose we go on for years and years and years. How would it be, do you think, when we are both past sixty, to fulfil our troth and marry? Dreadful thought! Love belongs to youth. If Frank cannot marry me when I am young, and when he can kiss me and fondle me for the sake of *mes beaux yeux*, let him not marry me at all. I would rather remain single *for his sake*. Would not you, Kate? Oh! to wait, and wait—his plighted word holding true—till my cheeks are withered and my beauty all gone, and there is nothing to remind him of the Grace he used to love: and then to feel that all the passion was dead, and nothing left but the smouldering ashes of duty! Let me marry my Frank when I am young and fair, or let me never marry at all. Farewell, dear Kate. Tell him from me—oh! what message can I send him? You are the kindest sister-in-law that ever poor girl was *going* to have. Tell him, in any guarded way that you like—not in so many words, because it is immodest and unwomanly, only it is true—that I love him—I love him

—I love him; and that there can never be more than one man in all the world to me.

“Your own
“GRACE.”

The foregoing very silly and young-ladyish effusion—over which I do hope my readers will not linger till they become critical—may be read by the light of the preceding chapter.

Those who are too captious about girls' letters will remark that there is no postscript at all in it.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER living three or four weeks at Mrs. Skimp's, Frank made up his mind to shift his quarters. Great joy, accordingly, fell upon the inmates of the boarding-house in Grenville-square, in whose opinion Mr. Melli-ship gave himself unbecoming airs—nobody except old Bowker and half-witted Eddrup, being good enough company for him.

“After all, what was he?” they asked scornfully. “A singer at a music hall!”

Captain Bowker, who had never before found such a listener as Frank, was most unfeignedly sorry to see the only person in the place with an ear for poetry depart. Besides, the old fellow liked Frank, and so begged him to come and spend Sunday evenings with him, when the others were generally out. This Frank promised to do when he could, to the Captain's great relief.

The first day after he left, one or two of Mrs. Skimp's gentlemen so far plucked up courage again as to begin their persecution of Mr. Eddrup as of old.

But he had a friend in the old sailor, who, taught by Frank's example, confronted his assailants with so angry a visage, and language of such briny flavour, that they reluctantly gave up their fun.

So that at Mrs. Skimp's table Frank's memory was kept green by the Captain, and the good he had effected in Mr. Eddrup's behalf was not allowed to perish.

As Mr. Leweson had sent him to Skimp's when Frank made up his mind to leave there he mentioned the matter to him.

"You might lodge with the Silvers. They have room for somebody with them, I know," Mr. Leweson said—regretting next moment that he had suggested it, foreboding disturbance to Patty's peace of mind.

Frank offered to become the occupant of Mr. Silver's two vacant rooms, and was accepted without demur.

He was heartily glad to escape from the noise and coarseness of Skimp's to a room of his own, where, at least, he could be alone.

Patty Silver had furnished the first floor—left empty by their last tenant—for him, not magnificently, it is true, but as well as the slender funds of the family permitted. He had a bed; and, in his sitting-room, a carpet and a table, and as many chairs as he could expect for twelve shillings a-week.

Patty cooked his dinner for him; and before he went to the Palace, he took a cup of tea with the Silvani Family; then after he had sung his three songs, and borne the applause—which humiliated him more than singing the songs—he smoked a pipe in Mr. Silver's company before he went to bed; but as he smoked and listened, or replied in monosyllables to the prophetic discourse of the acrobat—who never talked

on any subject but one—his thoughts were miles away in the past or in the future.

“The future!” he used to think, after his nightly purgatory. “How long shall I go on with it? And what next?”

He had the pleasure of sending something weekly to his mother and sister. He had the pleasure weekly of hearing of them and of Grace. But he could not continue to sing at the Palace after his engagement was over. It was but the shift of a penniless man. All day he lived in terror lest some old friend should see him, and proclaim his disgrace—as he thought it.

Night after night he searched the sea of faces for one he knew. He never saw one. The Palace is not a place where country cousins go. The “loonatics” who patronised Mr. Leweson were all of Islington blood; unmixed Cockneys; City clerks, dressed *à la mode*; young shopmen, making half-a-crown purchase nearly as much dissipation as a sovereign will buy in the west; with a good sprinkling of honest citizens, fond of an evening out, neither they nor their wives averse to the smell of tobacco and the taste of beer. But no face he knew. He was as safe from discovery, under the cover of Signor Cipriano, at the Palace as he would have been in San Francisco.

Still he resolved not to stay with Mr. Leweson after the two months’ engagement had expired.

When he told him, Mr. Leweson sighed—

“I thought so—I always thought so. You are too good for my loonatics. Now I shall begin to advertise your last nights.”

The posters came out. “Last Nights of Signor Cipriano!” in flaring capitals, stared Frank in the

face from every hoarding round Islington. His fame went up by means of the bills to the breezy heights of Hampstead, to hilly Highgate, to the woods of Hornsey, and to far-off Finchley.

At his lodgings, Frank did not see very much of Patty. At tea and in the evening they met; but the girl hardly spoke. She left the talking to her father, who poured out a never-ending stream of commentary. Frank, as he listened, learned what strange shapes religion sometimes takes in a mind uneducated, but enthusiastic, simple, and imaginative.

Mr. Silver had but one desire—to spiritualise himself to the utmost. He cared nothing what he ate and drank; except that it must be sufficient to maintain his strength. He was indifferent to his calling, come failure or come success; save that he recognised the duty of doing his best in it. He had no fears for the future, either for himself or his children, in whom he thought he saw the "Light." A man indifferent to the world, utterly selfish, utterly *un-careful*. That his daughter should perform on the bars with himself seemed to him a matter so simple, after all the practice they had had together, that he never thought about it at all; and his own conscience being satisfied, he cared absolutely nothing about the opinion of the world.

It pleased him to have Frank with him. First, because he could talk. Talk with a man who disputes and argues is a great deal more refreshing than talk with one who accepts undoubtingly, as Patty and her brother used to do. Then Frank was cheery; he kept the children, as Mr. Silver called both Patty and Joe, alive and happy—told them stories, and made them

laugh. The prophet, as Frank called him, had no objection to seeing people laugh—his religion was not a gloomy one.

I have shown how Frank sketched a portrait of Mr. Silver. But in three days after he moved into his new lodgings, he renewed his proposition to draw a portrait of Patty.

"Vanity," said the Prophet, with a smile.

"You were pleased with yours, father," urged his daughter.

"Draw her if you like, Mr. Melliship."

They had a sitting that very afternoon, in Frank's sitting-room. His easel, the table; his canvas, a large piece of rough drawing paper; his materials, chalks. He was going to draw her life-size. Mr. Silver thought there was going to be made a pencil sketch in a dozen touches, like that of himself.

Frank engaged the girl to silence, and worked away for a few mornings with a will. He only put in her head, as she refused to have her hands drawn. The poor girl was very sensitive about her disfigured hands. The likeness was perfect; but he permitted himself, with the licence of an artist, to add a few accessories. Her hair was dressed and crowned with flowers; jewels were round her neck. She was no longer Patty the acrobat, but a countess, a queen, dressed for conquest. The picture conquered Patty. Ever since Frank caught her in his arms, and saved her from death, the image of the fair-haired, sweet-spoken young man, the only gentleman she had ever spoken to, the only gentleman who had ever spoken to her, filled her foolish little brain. He came to tea with them; he came and lived with them; brought brightness into a house which had

almost too much of Ezekiel about it. Then he brought flowers every day for her, because she liked flowers; he bought ribands for her, because she liked a little finery; and gloves, because her own pair were old and dirty. He paid her little attentions, meaning nothing, though she thought they meant a good deal. And so, like Margaret—type of every innocent and ignorant girl—she asked herself a dozen times a day, “He loves me—loves me not?” He loved her not; he hardly gave her a thought, save that she was nice, pleasant to look at, pleasant to talk to. But love!

Sometimes in the mornings, when there was no rehearsal, he went for walks with her, starting early, and going up to Highgate and beyond—where there are fields and wild flowers still to be had, though London is so near. The boy went with them; but Patty had the pleasure of talking to Frank, telling him all her little hopes; for the girl was as confiding as innocence could make her, save when her own secret was concerned.

The portrait was framed, and hung in the room where the family ate and drank and sat. This, in spite of protests from the father—who soon, however, got into the habit of looking at the portrait of his daughter. As he looked, he said, the likeness disappeared.

One day, after gazing steadily at the picture for a long time, he exclaimed—

“I have it now. It is no longer the portrait of my daughter—it is the picture of the daughter of Jephthah.”

Frank looked at his handiwork. It was, in a sense, true. Patty’s features; but somehow there was in her

eyes, what he had never noticed before, a look of expectancy, as of suffering to come—the tale of lamentation and sacrifice foreshadowed in her gaze. It was wonderful. His hands had done it all unawares; but it was there.

“It might stand for the daughter of Jephthah,” he murmured. “But Patty’s face is too bright. See, Mr. Silver,” he said, as Patty looked up from her work, “there is no sadness there. You don’t see any sacrifice in Patty’s eyes, do you?”

Patty blushed as her father looked first at her, and then at the picture.

“It is there; the expression is there—the look of Jephthah’s daughter—as well as in the portrait.”

He relapsed into one of his trances, becoming now more frequent, and was silent.

Patty’s face, to an outsider, certainly offered as few indications of future sorrow as many girls’. The dimples in her cheeks showed how prone she was, by original sin, to light-heartedness and gaiety; the clearly defined arch of her eyebrows, her clustering chestnut hair, the deep brown of her eyes, the freshness of her cheeks, pointed her out as one destined to be loved. But to all this Frank was blind. He had only one love—only one idea of womanhood.

Blind! Blind!

For they were together during these weeks; and day after day, Patty was drinking new draughts of intoxication and of passion. She looked at herself in the glass more than she had ever done before; she put on the little bright bits of colour which Frank had bought her in the shape of ribands; she lamented over her hands; she began to be ashamed of her work.

More than all, she began to be ashamed of her professional costume. She rejoiced that her performances began when Frank's were finished, and that he did not see them; she thought little of the thousands of eyes that did. All these were nothing. What did it matter what she did before the stupid public who came to see her fly through the air, and perhaps kill herself?

"'He loves me—loves me not?' He is a gentleman, delicately nurtured. He cannot bear rough, coarse hands, pulled out of shape by hard, unwomanly work. He loves women with accomplishments, who can write without having to think how to spell the words. He loves women who can dress in silk and satin, and put on all manner of bravery. He has some one in that upper world to which he belongs—some one whom he loves."

Or she would awake, fresh and hopeful, and radiant as the rosy fingered dawn.

"He talked to me all day yesterday. He brought me flowers and fruit. He laughed at what I said, and called me silly. He admired my bonnet. He loves me! He loves me!"

So the little tragedy went on;—the girl trying to think that Frank loved her; the little heart beating with all the nameless hopes and fears; the eyes that watched for a sign, only the smallest sign, of love; the ears that listened for the least little vibration of passion; the cheeks that flushed when he drew near, and flushed again when he went away. And Frank and her father, callous to it all, ignorant of it, unsuspecting—each thinking of the thing that interested him most; Frank burning to get through his two months' engage-

ment, the Prophet finding ever fresh food for his mystic imagination.

"Patty," said Frank, one morning, "one thing always astonishes me about you. Where are your lovers? What are all the young fellows thinking of?"

She flushed scarlet. Her lovers? Alas! she had but one, and he did not love her. And only this morning she had risen so full of hope and joy, because Frank had spoken to her the day before more kindly, as she thought, than usual.

"Lovers!" she echoed sharply. "I have none—I want none."

And went straightway to her own room, where she sobbed her eyes out.

Frank looked after her in some surprise. He had never known Patty in a temper before.

He went out to see Mr. Eddrup, knowing by this time where to find him in the morning.

Mr. Eddrup was in his court—the court which now, save one or two houses, belonged to him. It was his. In it he had organised a sort of parish, of which he was the sole minister and vicar in charge; for the parish had given it up in despair. Here he had a school; here was a chapel; here were a wash-house and baths; here, in itself complete, all the things that go to soften and ameliorate the lot of poverty. And here, for forty years, he had spent his days and nights; a long self-sacrifice, more complete than that of the hermits of the Thebaïd, perhaps with more suffering. Here he had spent every farthing that could be snatched from the expenses of his meagre life—the money that should have clothed him

well, that might have procured him comfort, and even luxury—that might have given him a position in the world. And not the money only. That was nothing. But his youth, his pride, his ambition, his passion, his dreams of love and visions of fair women—all, all were merged and sunk in this little court of twenty houses, which he found a den of thieves, and had turned into a house of prayer. Seventy years of age now—an old man, bowed and bent, but full of zeal and energy—he went to and fro among his people. They were always sinning, and always being punished, because the poor get punished in this world more than the rich. They were always in distress, out of work, out of health, behind with everything; and they looked to him for everything—for help, advice, consolation. He gave them what he had. For money; he lent it, at no interest. They paid him back when they were able. Advice, consolation, experience, he gave them for nothing. It was his *métier* to give.

Not to give money: that was his rule. Not to pauperize the people. To avoid the mistakes of the Church; to make people provident; to help them in their efforts; to trust in their honesty, and to make them honest by trusting them. To teach especially the things that belong to poor people—the virtues, not of obedience and contentment, which are servile virtues, but of moderation, cleanliness, and good temper. This was his method. He neither wrote nor agitated; but found a little spot in this great London, and set himself to improve it. Presently, as it became improved, came the necessity for religion. Then he made himself their leader, and held services for prayer and praise, where every one might speak the thing

that was in him. The people respected themselves; they respected their friend and teacher more.

Frank found him at the entrance of the court, preparing to slip away, in his noiseless and shy way, along the streets to Skimp's in Granville-square. Frank offered him his arm, and walked with him. The old man was very silent, as usual.

It was not by any means their first meeting in this way. Once or twice a week Frank came round to the court at three o'clock, the time when Mr. Eddrup's work was generally over, and walked home with him. They seldom talked much. But the old man's heart had warmed to Frank. He was the only one, for forty years, who had brought his youth and cheerfulness across his path; the only gentleman—and Mr. Eddrup's heart still warmed to gentlemen—who had crossed his weary path: always excepting Captain Hamilton and the medical students of Skimp's.

To-day, he said not a word till they reached the door of Skimp's.

"You asked me, some time since," he began, abruptly, pausing with the latch-key in his hand, "why I live this life. Come in, and I will tell you."

There was no one in the drawing room. Mr. Eddrup sat down at the open window, and passed his hand across his brow.

"Forty years," he murmured—"forty years. I am like the children of Israel in the wilderness. It is a long time. But it will soon be over. A few more months, or days, and my work will be done. Mr. Melliship, you have told me your story. It is a sad one—it is a very sad one. But you have one consideration—the greatest; it is not your fault that you

are poor. You can look the world in the face and laugh at it, because you are innocent. I asked you to look at my forehead. Look again. Is there not the seal of guilt upon it? The mark of Cain? Look close. Do not think to spare me."

He threw back his long white locks with a gesture of despair.

"I see nothing," said Frank, "but the reverend white hairs of a good man."

Mr. Eddrup sighed.

"I will tell you. I knew I must tell it before I died," he said. "I don't ask you to keep my secret. All the world may know it again, as they did before. I shall some day—soon—tell my people: whenever I feel strong enough, I mean," he said, correcting himself hastily—"whenever I feel less cowardly, and able to do so. Mr. Melliship, I am nothing better than a convicted thief! You shrink—you shrink from me. See how quickly the veil of reputation drops off!"

"Mr. Eddrup, I did not shrink. What you have been matters not. The thing is, what you are."

"What I am—What I am!" he repeated. "What am I? A hypocrite, who wears a mask—a man who goes about the world under false pretences. See—see this—read it."

He took from his pocket-book part of a worn newspaper, yellow with age, ragged at the edges. An old *Times*, dated July the 8th, 1825. Frank half opened it, and then gave it back.

"I don't want to read it. Why should I? Mr. Eddrup, you who preach of faith and charity, have you forgotten hope?"

"It is more than forty years ago. I was poor. I

was burning with zeal and ambition. I longed to distinguish myself. I had talents—not great talents, but some ability. But I was too poor to make myself known. I wanted to go into the world, and get friends. Then a terrible temptation assailed me. I was beset with it night and day. I had no rest. The voice of the tempter woke me at night, and kept me feverish all the day. It said, ‘Use it, use it—no one will know. Presently you will have money, and you will replace it.’ Trust money! I waited, and listened to the tempting voice. The years passed by. I was nearly thirty. I used it. It is forty years ago; but even now the memory of that day, and the misery I felt when my self-respect was gone, haunt me till I know not whether it is repentance or the gnawing of the worm that never dies. I used the money—for my own purposes.”

Great beads stood upon his forehead as he made his confession. He was silent again for a space.

Frank held his breath.

“After a year they found it out. I had not yet been able to replace the money. They arrested me. It made some noise. They tried to get me off; but it was all too clear. I had six months’ imprisonment, and came out into a world which was dark to me for the future. I was poor when I became a felon. I was rich when I came out of prison. One of my relatives had died, leaving me all his money—having forgotten, I believe, to alter his will. I paid back the money I had stolen. I hid myself for a year, in despair and misery, creeping out at night. What should I do with my life? I thought that I would bury myself in solitude, and try to do some secret

good: not in atonement, young man, remember—I never thought that. Nothing that man can do will ever atone. The evil remains. It is his misery sometimes to see the evil that he has begun work its steady way upward, like a tree that he has planted. Sometimes, if he does not see it, he *feels* it.”

“Is repentance nothing? Is a life of good works nothing?”

Mr. Eddrup shook his head.

“What I never shake off from myself is the feeling that one *never forgets*. I want an assurance of a river of Lethe. I want, not to be forgiven so much as to forget—not so much to escape punishment, as to hold up my head again. Punishment, pain, suffering—what does it mean? Nothing, nothing. But self-respect. Can—will Heaven give back that? Preachers tell us of sins forgiven: they say nothing of honour restored. A Heaven of Praise, with my brother sinners, because we have escaped punishment, would be no Heaven for me. I want more. It is the assurance of that perfect forgiveness which restores as well as pardons that I want. Young man, pray, night and morning, and all day long, that you may not be led into temptation.”

He dropped his face into his hands; and Frank, meek and silent before this revelation and sorrow, slipped quietly away, and left him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE summer passes into autumn: the woods of Hunslope Park are tinged with yellow. Dick Mortiboy, leaving Lafleur to work out the System alone, lingers at his villa. He has bought horses and traps;

he rides about the country; he knows every village, and nearly every man in it, for miles round Market Basing; he gives dinners to his tenants; receives all his clients, from Lord Hunslope downwards, with the same affability; throws away his money—the Mortiboy money, gotten with so much labour and pains—with an easy prodigality endearing him to all that large class of mankind which admires generosity when it flows towards itself. But for one thing, his popularity would be perfect. Dick will go to no private parties. They lay traps for him; publicly invite him to dinner; catch him by the button-hole, and try to inveigle him into an engagement; lead him to the doors of their houses, and almost drag him in. But Dick won't go. One house alone he frequents: his cousins'—the Heathcotes'. Is he paying attention to one of the girls? A serious question to the ladies of Market Basing. If so, it must be Grace—that designing young girl who used to flirt with Frank Melliship, and threw him over when he was ruined. It can't be Lucy, who hasn't spirit enough even to look in the face of a man. He may be paying his attentions to one of the girls, but it is difficult to tell which.

And all this time, Dick is fighting a battle with himself. He went at first to Parkside because he liked to talk freely, and it was the only house, he thought, in his ignorance of the world, where people would not laugh at his rough speech. Fancy the world presuming to laugh at a man with half a million and more of money! He goes now—though he knows he ought not—because he likes to go there only too well. He has never dared—strong and brave as he is—to meet his thought face to face; but secretly there is

growing up within him a passionate desire to be free: to shake off the yoke of Polly, and to seize for his own his cousin Grace. He is beginning to beat it down, this growing passion.

Grace, meantime, unsuspecting of his altered feelings, treats him with the same perfect freedom she might show to her own brother. But her mother was right—Dick Mortiboy loved her.

“I do wonder, Dick,” she said sometimes, “how we should have managed to get on without you. What a good fellow you were to come home as you did, just at the time when you were most wanted, when we should have been left so lonely. I think we shall civilize you by degrees. Already you’ve left off some of your bad habits. Don’t you think he’s improved, Lucy? Women have some use in the world, Dick, however you may despise them.”

“I don’t despise them.”

“They polish men and things. Jane, the housemaid, polishes the dining-room table; her mistresses polish their cousin Dick. I don’t know which is the pleasanter task.”

They were out for drives in his dogcart—Grace in front, Lucy behind. Then he sat silent, and let Grace prattle to him. Or they went out for long rides with him, and were fain to confess that Dick rode better even than Frank.

“Are you girls happy?” he asked once, in an abrupt way.

“Why, Dick?”

“I can’t make it out. You lead such quiet lives. You never go away anywhere. You see no strange

faces—you have no excitement—you know nothing. I hardly call it life.”

“Perhaps we like quiet lives, Dick,” said Lucy.

“No, we don’t, Dick,” said Grace. “What we are taught from our infancy is to be content with quiet lives, because we shall never get anything else. I should like to go about the world and see things. I should like to have a little peril—just a little, you know—to talk about afterwards. And I should like to see the beautiful places in the world that you talk about.”

“I don’t know,” said Lucy; “I like being here best. I hope to stay here all my life. We are happy, are we not, Grace?” caressing her sister, whose temperament was so different from her own.

“Happy? Yes—I suppose so. Don’t you know, Cousin Dick, that it is always prudent to confine your wishes within the probability of their accomplishment? That seems a very wise thing to say—but I saw it in a book the other day. The learned author went on to remark, that if you wisely wished for what was most likely to happen to you, and prayed night and morning for it to come, you would, in all probability, and provided you had faith enough, get what you prayed for.”

“Grace, dear, don’t.”

But Grace went on.

“As for me, I am not so happy as I should like to be. Not because my life is dull; but—oh! quite another thing—because, you see, I am wishing and praying for what does not come. That is the only change I want. And, oh dear! it is a terrible great change to ask. Are you happy, Dick?”

"Pretty well. There are one or two things that bother me as I lie in my hammock at night."

"You would like poor Uncle Richard to get well again," said Lucy.

"No, that is not one of them. Of course I should, Lucy. But that is not one of them."

"Can we help you, Dick?" said Grace.

"No; I hardly think you can. But let me help you, if I may."

"Some day, Dick, I mean to ask you, perhaps."

She held out her hand frankly. At the touch of her slender fingers, the great, solid-looking man fairly trembled and shook. But Grace was gone, and he turned moodily away.

Was he paying attention? Was he in love with his cousin? Was he letting the thought of her dwell in his mind day after day, till it became a power almost too great to be resisted?

About two miles from Market Basing stands, on a small eminence, a cross—one of the crosses erected by Edward the First in honour of Queen Eleanor. It is placed at the side of the road, and, standing on its steps, you have a wide and very pretty view of Market Basing, and the surrounding meadows. On a platform of red sandstone, in seven steps, is the cross itself, about forty feet high. The lowest part is octagonal, bearing on its sides, much defaced, the arms of Castille and Leon, and Ponthieu in Picardy. Above this is another small tower of twelve feet. Every other side of this tower contains a crowned female figure, defaced, but not yet destroyed by time. This is surmounted by a small four-sided tower, on which is a

marble cross, formerly gilt. It had been old Mr. Mortiboy's favourite drive. He would get down from John Heathcote's dogcart—for it was on the road to Parkside—and, leaving him standing in the road, would climb the steps, and contemplate the town and his property lying beneath him. When he was a younger man, he used to walk out and back.

Dick, one afternoon in September, was driving Grace Heathcote home in his dogcart. She had come to town with her father, who had business to detain him later.

As they passed the cross, Grace pointed it out to him.

"Your father used to be so fond of standing on the steps, and looking at the town, Dick. Let us get down and see the view. You can count your houses with your finger, as he used to do."

"I don't much care for views, and I don't want to count my houses," said Dick. "But you always have your own way."

"There is no use in being a woman unless you have it, is there?"

"Lead the horse to the top of the hill, walk him down, and wait for us, Bob."

They stood on the steps of the old cross: Grace on the top step, and Dick one or two steps lower.

"Look, Dick—look; is it not beautiful?"

A beautiful landscape of peace and plenty, lit up with an autumn sun, can make things beautiful. Dick turned for a moment to the scene, but his eyes went back to Grace. The girl touched him on the shoulder, and bade him look for his own house. A second time,

at her touch, Dick trembled and shivered. For she had never looked so lovely.

"Don't, Grace," he said, in a constrained voice. He was exerting all his strength to prevent himself from taking the slight and delicate figure in his arms, and crushing it to his heart. "Don't, Grace. Don't touch me."

"Why not, Dick?"

"Because I love you, Grace. Because I cannot bear it any longer."

The girl shrank back in momentary dread. For his eyes were fixed on her, and had a hungry, yearning look—a wild look.

They heard no sound in the air, save the song of a lark above them, and the crunching of the gravel made by the horse's hoofs and the wheels of the dog-cart. Another sound there was: but they were both deaf: the sound of voices—a woman's voice.

"Where's your master, Bob?"

"Nigh the cross, with Miss Grace."

Bob went on; and the woman, stepping on the grass by the wayside, noiselessly went on till she came to the cross. Then she slipped behind it, and listened.

"I love you, Grace," Dick went on. "I tell you that I have fought against it, because Lucy told me something—I half forget. There is another. What do I care about any other man? There is no man in the world I am afraid of."

"Do you think women are to be fought for, Dick? You are not in Texas now."

"Forgive me. I'm only a common and a rough man, Grace, my—my darling." She shrank farther back. The woman behind gave a little hiss, and clenched her

fists. "I'm not fit to speak to a girl like you. If you knew all, you would say so yourself. But I can't help myself, Grace. I swear I can't help myself. Look here: if you touch me, I shake all over. Yet I am not happy except I am near you. If you speak to me, I tingle with pleasure. If you knew, Grace—if you only knew, what a wild beast is in me now, telling me to take you in my arms, and kiss, and kiss you again, you would run away shrieking."

"I'm not afraid of you, Cousin Dick."

But she was.

"The devil and all of it is, you see, Grace," he went on after a pause, during which he was wrestling with and getting the better of his wild beast—"the devil of it is—I'm glad, after all, that I have told you, because now things will be easier—that I could not even ask you to marry me."

"You know, Dick, that it would be useless if you could."

"I know. The other—boy—Frank—Melliship—I know."

He sat down on the lower step, and crunched his heel into the grass.

"If you knew all, I said—yes, if you knew all, I think you would—pity—me, Grace. If I could only find something to say that would make you love me! If I could only make you understand—only I can't talk as some men can—how I long for you, how I curse the—the cause that keeps me from hoping ever to marry you."

"Dick, I never—never could marry you."

"But I should have a chance—at least, I should think so—if it were not for her, Grace." He started to

his feet, and stretched out his arms to her wildly. "Grace, what does all the world matter, and what they think or say? See, I love you, I will fight for you, and—and worship you all my life. I am rich, I will give you anything that you like to ask. The world over there is far more beautiful than here. Come away with me. We will build a house in California, in a spot I like well. The sun is always bright there. Grace, come with me. I am a man; I am not a puny stripling like Frank Melliship. Men know me, and are afraid of me. But *I*—I, my girl, am afraid of no man in the world—no man. Roaring Dick is king wherever he goes!"

He was mad with passion. His eyes were aglow with a strange fire, his voice was harsh and hoarse. He made a movement towards the shrinking and terrified girl, with outstretched arms. Grace shrieked, and fell back against the cross.

Then between them stepped the listening woman.

"No," she cried—"no, Grace Heathcote: leave me my husband, at least. Take his rings and his presents, hear his fine speeches—you may have them; but you shan't have *him*. Not that—not that. Leave him to me. He is mine—mine: my handsome Dick. You think you will get away from your Polly. Not you, my lad, not you. Not yet—not yet."

She had been drinking; her face was flushed and red; she wore a coarse country dress; she was frowsy and heated: her voice thick. Good heavens! what a contrast to the sweet and delicate girl who stood above her on the steps, white and frightened.

"Pretty things for a wife to hear—very pretty things, upon my word. And as for you, you young minx—"

Here Dick laid his heavy hand on her shoulder, and swung her round. She looked up at him, in her rage and fury, with parted lips and flaming cheeks. Her husband was pale and calm, save for the trembling of his lips.

His eyes met hers.

You know how, in the Festin de St. Pierre, the statue of the Commandant lays his irresistible hand upon the shoulder of Don Juan. At its cold touch, the bravado and courage go out of the man. As it weighs him down, he sinks lower and lower till the earth closes over him.

At the first touch of Dick's hand, Polly trembled. When he turned her round, and she read, not wrath, but a cold pitiless determination in his face, her rage died out suddenly, and she became cold all over. She dropped her eyes. He looked at her steadily for a few moments, and then said, in a husky voice—

“Go away from this, Polly. Keep out of my way—you'd best—for the present.”

The woman went on her way down the hill without a word.

Grace sat down, and buried her face in her hands. She forgot her own terror in her sorrow for Dick. Across his face had flashed, for a moment only, a look of misery and shame that cut her to the heart.

“Oh! Cousin Dick—Cousin Dick,” she cried, bursting into tears—“I am so sorry.”

“Forgive me, Grace,” he said, quietly. “Forgive me. I get mad sometimes, you know. I was mad then. Tell me you forgive me.”

She held out her hand. In truth, she had never

caught the meaning of his words. How should she know what they meant?

He took her hand in his, and kept it.

"I was only nineteen when I married her. Even then there was no excuse for me. But she made me do it. I took her up to London, when my father sent me to work at our town agent's. We were married in St. Pancras Church. Then I left home, was turned out by my father—all my fault, Grace, not his, remember that—and I left her. Till the time I came home again, I never thought of her. Now I have to pay her to keep silence. Pity me, Grace."

"I do pity you, Dick—I pity you from my heart."

"I said what I ought not, my child. I said I loved you. That is true. You will always remember that I loved you, will you not? As long as I live, I shall love you. But you may trust me, Grace. I shall never offend you again. For I can never ask you to marry me."

"And, oh, Dick—oh, Cousin Dick, you won't try to do any harm to Frank?"

"Frank Melliship? I'm not the man, Grace. Marry whom you like. I will help you—that is, if I can."

She laid her hand in his once more. He looked down at her: the passion faded out of his deep black eyes—eyes now soft and tender as a woman's.

"Go, Grace. Keep my secret. I must stay here awhile, and think. Go home without me, my child."

"I am afraid—of *her*, Dick."

"She *dares* not touch you. By——!"—he clenched his fists—"But I will walk with you to the top of the hill, and see you safe with Bob."

"Good-bye, Dick. Don't do anything dreadful.

Oh! I am so afraid you should." Then she added, almost in a whisper, "Don't be cruel to *her*."

They parted: she with a heart full of new and strange sympathies and sorrows; he subdued and heavy-laden.

He pulled out his cigar case, and smoked for above an hour, sitting on the steps of the old cross. Then the sun got low, and he got up and walked homewards.

At the foot of the rising ground on which the cross stands, runs the river which winds down the plain, and flows between his father's house in Derngate and his own little villa. He took the towing-path, and followed it moodily. It was a very lonely path: few people walked there by day, and none by night. The barges have all left it long since, and the deserted stream flows along broad and deep, between the trees which overhang it on either side.

Presently, before him in the path, he saw his wife. She had been drinking again, since he sent her away, to drown her fears; and now she stood in the way before him, facing him, with her arms akimbo, and a loud, defiant laugh.

"So you've done your fine talk with Grace Heathcote at last, and now you're coming to beg my pardon, I suppose."

Dick grew purple with passion. He seized her by the waist in his mighty arms, and, without saying a single word, raised her aloft and threw her—heavy as she was—six foot and more into the river. With a shriek, the woman fell into the deepest part of the stream, and disappeared.

Dick's wrath, when there was no opposition to feed it, was as short-lived as a straw-fire. He looked at

the rings of water widening round the spot where Polly had fallen in, with an expression which rapidly changed from extreme rage to one more like extreme vexation.

"Caramba!" he cried—"what if I've drowned her?"

But he might have spared himself his anxiety. The cold water sobered her in a moment; and rising from the mud at the bottom, into which her head had at first plunged, she came to the surface. Ten feet lower down, a fallen tree lay half across the stream. The current bore her on before she had time to sink again. She clutched the branches, which bent and ducked her again and again. But at last she landed herself, and clambering up the bank, wet and dripping, turned in fury upon her lord and master.

Dick was sitting on the grass, laughing as if it was the best joke he had ever known in his life.

"I told you how it would be, Polly, if you split. Now you see. Lord! if you could only get a sight of your own face!"

She had risen from the waves, like Venus Anadyomene. Encumbered as she was with her draggled clothes, she only resembled the goddess in that one fact. Besides the mud at the bottom, which was still in her hair and bonnet, she had collected a goodly quantity of duckweed on her way out of the water, which hung in graceful festoons upon her shoulders.

"You'd better go home to your mother and get dry, Polly."

"I'll cry all over Market Basing that I'm your wife. I'll have revenge, you black, murdering villain. I'll have my rights out of you, I will."

"Then, Polly, perhaps next time you go into the river, you will stay there."

Dick strode off alone, leaving his wife on the other side.

When he got home, he bolted the door, so that her key was of no use. About ten o'clock, a little gravel was thrown up at his window. It was Polly, crying.

"Dick, let me in—let me in, Dick. I'm very sorry, and I haven't told nobody—on my sacred word, I haven't. I said I'd been a blackberryin', and fell in."

Dick poked an unrelenting head out of the window. At sight of it, his wife put her handkerchief to her face and sobbed loudly.

"Polly," said the inhuman Dick, "you may go to the devil."

Polly went home. She arose early next morning, and repaired again, trembling, to the house. But she might just as well have gone defiantly, for Dick Mortiboy was off to town by the six o'clock train.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOLLOW me, as the old novelists used to say, to Paragon-place, Gray's Inn-road. This pleasant retreat lies on the east side of the road, not very far from the lordly entrance to Gray's Inn. Paragon-place is a *cul de sac*; and as it consists only of six houses in all, it passes a peaceful and quiet existence, having but little intercourse with the outer world. It consists of a single row of five houses, with another at the end, looking down the court. They face a paved alley of

ten feet in breadth. The northern side of Paragon-place is bounded by a brick wall, eight feet high, set about and garnished, for the better protection of the inhabitants, by a plentiful top-dressing of broken bottles. The wall may also serve as a protection to the printers' offices which lie beyond. At all events, it is a barrier insuperable between Paragon-place and the printers. Thus fashion separates itself from business: leisure and retirement from compulsory work.

I would that we might linger over Paragon-place and its inhabitants. About every house there hang half a dozen histories; from the tale of every dweller might be woven a romance of real life—that is, a tale of sin and suffering, of poverty and sorrow. We have to do with one only. It is the third tenement in the row. Like the rest, it consists of three main rooms, lighted, each “fore and aft”—the front window looking into the court, the back commanding a view of a small yard beyond, about six feet square, containing a water-butt and a heap of rubbish.

There is a staircase leading to two rooms, one over the other, above. On the left hand of the door, as you go in, is a sort of closet or small room, which may be used as a bedroom when the family overflows the rest of the house. It is lighted and ventilated by an aperture giving space for a single pane of glass.

The doors of the houses, which were once painted green, but long years since, stand open. Everything about the court is intolerably dirty. Odds and stray bits of vegetables, as cabbage stalks, potato peelings, and such small wreck and *débris*, lie about the stones; a gutter runs along the wall, down which is merrily flowing, at this moment, the bucket of soapsuds which

No. 1 has just emptied into it. Two children, having hastily constructed a model ship out of a splinter of wood, have launched it upon this river, and are watching its progress down the tributary stream to the great Mississippi of Gray's Inn Road. They run out with it into the street, and stay there. Then the court is quiet again, except for the pulse of the steam press, which is never silent. The sun shines on the windows of the printers' office, and is reflected back on the doorstep of No. 3, where sits, basking in its warmth, a figure, muffled as if it were winter, and smoking a long clay pipe. He is apparently bent and doubled up, from the effects of age: his shoulders stoop, and his back is round. On his head is a soft felt hat, much too large for him, which flaps down on the side nearest the door, but is lifted up on the other side to catch the sun. A crutch is beside him. In his hand is a copy of the day before yesterday's *Daily Telegraph*; and he is reading aloud, slowly and painfully, making comments as he goes—not running so much as crawling—to his companion, a child of nine or ten, who is sitting on the stones, with his back against the wall, in the reflected sunlight. The boy's head is bare: his feet are bare. One sleeve of his jacket is quite gone, the other nearly. His trousers are all rents and tatters, his white legs gleaming through the holes. His shirt will no longer button, and shows signs of approaching dissolution. All this is a trifle, because the weather is warm; and rags are just as comfortable in warm weather as anything else. Besides, the boy has not been brought up in a school which teaches the cultivation of personal appearance by means of sartorial art. He was far more interested

in the problem of how to satisfy that raging wolf which every day gnawed at his stomach, and instigated him to get food by any means.

"So you see, Bill," said the politician, in a thin, quavering voice, "the Guv'ment's gorn and done it agen, and the country's goin' to the devil. Now, if I was in the 'Ouse—"

He stopped and folded his paper.

"Don't go into the 'Ouse, Thoozy," said the child.

"It's not the work'us, stoopid. It's the House of Parlyment. Some day I think I shall go—to represent Finsbury. I wish there was the price of a half-pint in my pocket. Who's the swell coming up the court?"

The "swell," who was looking inquiringly up and down the court, seeing the pair outside the door, turned his steps in their direction.

"Can you tell me"—he spoke to the smoker, whose face was hidden by the flapping hat—"if a Mrs. Kneebone lives about here?"

He removed his pipe from his mouth, and his great hat from his head, and stood upright in the doorway, waving his hand with an air of authority.

Dick Mortiboy looked at him in astonishment. Behind the wrinkles and lines of age lay—not the colour, because the face was perfectly pale and colourless; nor the shape, because the cheeks were sunken and the features prominent; nor the comeliness, because the whole figure was starved and pinched; nor the redundant locks, because the scattered hairs, nearly white, lay sparse and thin about his temples—but an indescribable *look* of youth.

He was about four feet and a half in height; but

then he stooped a good deal. He had on a long, coarse coat, made for a grown man. His legs were cased in winter trousers. He had a thick flannel shirt, and a wrapper round his neck. His chest was flattened in—his legs bowed—his body bent. Dick, standing before him on the stones, stared at him without speaking. He had never seen this kind of creature before.

"When you *think* you'll recognize me again," said the boy, sarcastically, "perhaps you'll let me know."

"It *is* a boy, by gad," said Dick.

The child previously addressed as Bill set up a yell of delight, clapping his hands and dancing round. It was as good fun as he ever assisted at. The other relaxed from his sternness of expression, conceding an aged smile to the frivolities of the situation.

"Are you a boy, or are you a man?" asked Dick. "What's your name? Tell me something about yourself."

"You can read, I suppose?" said the nondescript, with a patronizing air. "You *can* do that much, I presume. Young Bill, the writin' materials. Give the old man his bit o' whitin'."

Bill produced a piece of chalk from his trousers pocket.

"Here y'are, Thoozy. Hooray!"

Thoozy inspected the "materials" with care, and looked for a point. This—in what mathematicians would describe as a rough eikosihedron, or twenty-sided solid—was difficult to find; but selecting something which would suit, he marched gravely down the steps, and, turning the sleeve of his coat up to his elbow, while he supported his long tails under the left

arm, raised his right hand to the brick wall. Then he stopped and turned round again.

"You *can* spell?" he said to Dick, looking at him sideways, as if with suspicion, but always with an eye on Bill.

Dick nodded.

"*And* read? Because I'm not going to take all this trouble for nothink, you know."

Little Bill screamed, and rolled himself over and over upon the cabbage stalks. Thoozy, with one eye on his young companion, proceeded slowly with his talk.

"Then," he said, stepping back and admiring the effect of the sunlight upon his strokes, "there's a C, and a OO, and a EK. If that don't spell Cook, that ain't my name, and Methoosalem ain't my nature."

"Oh, lord!" cried Bill, "ain't he a fizzer!"

Dick Mortiboy took the cigar out of his mouth, and contemplated the pair with an expression in which curiosity had the best part.

"So you're Mr. Methoosalem, are you? Pray, is this Bill—little Bill?"

"That *is* Bill, mister," said Thoozy, "and a very good little Bill he is. *I* educated that there boy. Bill, show the gentleman what you can do: the Catherine Wheel, my child."

He had resumed his commanding position on the doorstep, and issued his orders with a wave of the pipe, like the director of a circus using his whip.

The boy went through the graceful performance known among his friends of the pavement as the Catherine Wheel. "Houp-là!" he cried, bringing up his bare and dirty feet within an inch of Dick's waistcoat.

"*I* taught him the Wheel," said Thoozey. "I'm too old to do it myself. He learned the 'Houp-là!' hisself the night we got hold of two gallery checks for the Gaiety Theatre. He learnt that there of a fine gal—a dooced fine gal, sir. If I was a younger man—" here he stopped and winked with a sigh. "Now Bill, the Inverted Column."

"Never mind the Inverted Column," said Dick. "Here's a shilling for you, Bill. Go and get something to eat."

"Half a pint will be enough for me, William," cried the other, grandly, relighting his pipe. "And get a penn'orth o' belly-ache for yourself first. Plums that is, sir," he explained to Dick.

"How old *are* you, may I ask," said Dick.

"Eighty-six I am—a great age. I was seventy when I was born, sixteen years ago. And I've been getting older ever since. My old woman in there is only seventy-five."

"Who is your old woman?"

"Here she is—Mrs. Kneebone, sir, herself: the lady you was axing after. Not my wife you know, nor yet my mother, nor my grandmother. Come out, old woman. Here's a gentleman wants you to drink his health."

She was as withered and wrinkled as Methoosalem himself, but without his look of childhood. In her hand she held a wooden snuffbox, from which ever and anon she refreshed herself. She wore a dress of some kind of stuff, black in colour, and a bonnet on her head which might once have had some shape. At present it had none. An old woman who muttered as she went along: a creature who would have been

burned as a witch in the merry old days: an evil-looking, miserable old woman.

She shaded her eyes from the sun, and peered up at the stranger.

"I don't know you, sir. I can't let you in. I never saw you before. You can't come in here."

"What are you talking about?" said Thoozy. "Who said the gentleman did know you? Who talked about comin' in? Yah! He wants to have five minutes of your lively society, and he wants to look at you. You ain't none too pretty, neither."

"I want some information, for which I am willing to pay," said the stranger.

"About how long ago, sir?" asked the old woman, with a look of terror at the boy.

"About twelve years ago."

"What about twelve years ago?" She shook all over.

"That's when I begin to remember plain," said the boy. "Go ahead, sir—I can answer your questions. Old lady, cut it. Now go, d'yer hear?"

"Thoozy, my dear, be careful," she said, in a trembling voice. "Oh, be careful."

"Cut it, I say. Careful, indeed! Now then, sir. You can't have a more quieter and more genteeler spot than Paragon Place on a warm day in September, about two o'clock p.m., in the afternoon. The haristocracy is gone to the seaside, and there's no one to interrupt us. Fire away with your questions."

He put his hands in his pockets, and sat down on the door-step again.

"First, then, that child. You said his name was Bill. Bill what?"

"Lord help you! He ain't got no other name. Now, sir, *do* you think—I asks you as a stranger—do you think it *can* be done for the money? Where's your profit? That's what I say. Where's your profit to come from out of five bob a-week?"

He stuck his thumbs in his arm-holes, and looked as sagacious as a publisher.

"Who brought him here? How old is he? Who does he belong to?"

"A-hem! As a proprietor of this yer hospital, and, I may say, the resident physician, I holds out my hand, and I says, says I, How much?"

"Isn't Mrs. Kneebone the propietor?"

"On'y in the heyes of the bobby. If anything goes wrong, the coroner holds his inquidge round the corner, and Kneebone she goes before 'em and swears. I sits at home and smokes my pipe."

"Good. Tell me all about the boy. Here's a sovereign down, and five more if the inquiry leads me to anything I want."

"How do I know what you want?"

"That's just it. You don't know, and so you can't tell lies."

"Don't be too sharp, young feller, else you might fall down, though you are so big, and cut a hole in the pavin' stones. Bill was brought here, a three-weeks' baby, just nine years and a half ago. There was the devil's own trouble to keep him goin'; and he wouldn't have been kep' goin' at all, only his mother come round herself every day."

"What was the name of his mother? Nine years and a half ago? Who was his mother?"

"Polly Tresler."

Dick gave a low whistle.

"You're sure of it? You would swear it? You are *certain* of the date?"

"Take my dick on all the Bibles in the jug. Ask the old woman. Here, mother, come out again!"

She hobbled out.

"Now then, old lady, tell the gentleman how old Bill is. Show him your book. She's got a book, sir, and puts 'em all down."

"I'll show him that page," said Mrs. Kneebone, looking suspicious, "but no more, for five shillings."

It was a sort of register she brought him, covering about twenty years. She turned over the pages slowly, and at last arrived at her date.

"There you are, sir. Read it, but don't look at no more."

Dick read—

"Nov. 5, 1860. Boy—three weeks old—to be called Bill. Eighteenpence a-week. Mother's name and address, Miss Tresler"—(here an old address had been scratched out, and a new one substituted)—"P. T., Post-office, Market Basing."

Dick's eye ran down the list on the page. There was about half a dozen in the year. To four of their names was written the word, "Dead." To one, "Taken away by his father." Bill made the sixth.

"And that boy, sir, he've been the apple of my eye. He have indeed."

Thoozy winked, and jerked his pipe, which he had resumed, over his left shoulder, to indicate that his partner, or Principal Nurse of the Hospital, was prac-

tising a little amiable deception. She went on without noticing.

"The clothes he's had o' me; the pocket money he's had o' me; the oranges and apples, and—and—and the tripe he's had: it's what you wouldn't believe, sir. A beautiful breakfast he got only this morning."

"Kinchined a kid and collared a bloater in the gutter," interposed Thoozy.

"Now, don't you tell no lies. A idle, good-for-nothin' vagabond, as won't work, and won't do nothin' but smoke and drink."—(Here Bill arrived with a cargo of plums and a pint of beer, which Thoozy tackled on the spot.)—"It's ten years, sir, if you'll believe me, and I wish-a-ma-die if it ain't gawspel, that that boy said he was gettin' too old to work, and hasn't done a stroke since, but eat up all he can lay his hands to."

"Ten years!" said Thoozy. "So it is. I was only seventy-six then. I made a curious discovery, mister"—here he winked sideways at the old woman—"a very curious discovery; and I thought I'd make the most of it. On the strength of that there discovery, I'm a-goin' to spend my old age in a honourable retirement, as they says in the papers."

The old woman moved her lips, but said nothing.

"About this boy, now?" said Dick, in reply. "Here he is. If you've given him clothes, old woman, he's worn 'em out; and if you've given him grub, it hasn't agreed with him. Here, let me come in, and I'll take down all you've got to say. Is there such a thing in the house as a table, and paper and pens? Don't be afraid, I'm not going to do you any harm."

He pushed by the woman, who tried to stop him, and passed in. The entrance to the house was like

the entrance to Hades, as seen by Æneas, when, aided by the Sibyl, he undertook that perilous adventure of his—"for there were straightway heard cries, and wailing loud, and the spirits of infants weeping."

Dick pushed open a door, and looked in. There were lying on the floor, in sheets and flannels, four babies, from a few weeks to a year old; one or two clutching at life with strong and eager little fists; one or two meagre, thin, and emaciated. The old woman bustled by, and began to apply feeding bottles with great assiduity.

Dick looked at Thoozy with disgust.

"This is your precious hospital, is it, you little imp? Have you got another room?"

"There's my room and Bill's, up at the top—let's go there. Bill, run and fetch the gentleman a bit of paper, and a pen, and a penn'orth of ink. Upstairs, sir."

The stairs were horribly, fearfully dirty and noisome. Creeping things were on the walls. The bannisters were broken away; and on the top floor, where the boys slept, the planking of the stairs had been taken up to be burned for firewood.

There was no furniture in the room except a table, and a bed spread on the floor. Thoozy sat on the bed, and looked wistfully at his quiet guest.

"You don't want to do no harm to Bill, do you, sir?" speaking quite naturally, and like a boy. "You won't hurt he, will you? 'cos Bill's the only friend I got. The other boys laughs at me: says I'm too old to live long, and asks how long ago I was born, you see. But Bill, he was a right good sort, and we've

slep' together ever since he left off pap. My boy, Bill is."

"I won't hurt him, but I shall take him away from here."

"If it's best for him, I shan't say nothink. Don't believe that'ere old woman, sir. I would work if I could. But I can't. I'm too weak, and nobody won't have nothink to say to a baby-farm boy. I tried sellin' papers in the streets, and cigar lights; but the stronger boys pushed me about. I ain't strong, sir. Look at my legs." He pulled up his trousers, and showed a leg about half as big as Dick's wrist. "And I'll tell you something more about Polly, too, sir, if you'll be good to Bill. She was married lawful to Bill's father, 'cos I heard her tell the old woman so. He was a sailor, he was. And he went to sea. You ain't the man, are you, sir?"

Dick started. Here indeed was news worth having.

"You boy, find out that man's name, and keep a quiet tongue in your head, and I'll help you all round—except to find work, which is the only thing you can't get in this blessed old country."

"The old woman knows his name. I'll get it for you, never fear. She's afraid of me, she is, since I found her out. But she won't do it again, she won't."

"What is it you found out?"

"Here comes Bill," said Thoozy. "And the old woman, too——"

Dick pulled out five pounds, and laid them on the table.

"Now, Mrs. Kneebone, let us understand one another. This is for your information, provided it proves correct and true on subsequent investigation."

The old woman eyed the gold greedily.

She began her statement, which was in substance precisely the same as Thoozy had made; gave the dates exactly from her book; explained how the baby had been left with her at a charge of eighteen-pence a week, increased first to half-a-crown, and of late months to five shillings; swore that Bill was the child, and then held out her hand for the money.

"Not so fast," said Dick. "All that I knew before. This boy told me."

"You little devil!" cried Mrs. Kneebone, viciously to Thoozy, who nodded his head and laughed.

"I want more. I want to know about the boy's father. What was his name? and when was he married to Polly Tresler?"

"You want to know too much. Now, tell me, do you want to do Polly a bad turn?"

"I don't want to do her a good one, certainly. But I want to do a good turn to a friend of my own. And to get at the way of doing it, I want all the information I can lay my hands on."

"She's a bad lot, Polly is. I've knowed her for sixteen years and more. Ah me, I wasn't always in this poor place! But there—many's the good thing I've done for Polly. I introduced her to her first, down Poplar way—when I had as tidy a little tobacco shop as ever was. Ah! dear me."

"Her first?" Dick looked sharply at her. "Who was her first?"

"Oh, he was a mate—married at Lime'us Church. But they didn't get on. Polly used to beat him; and she got ashamed of a husband who couldn't beat her like the other men. A good quiet sort of body, too,

and a first officer. Bowker his name was. So when he went away to sea, she went away from Poplar, too."

"There's two sovereigns for you. And now go on."

The woman looked thirstily at the rest of the money, and presently went on again.

"Now, I don't know very well. She took up with a young fellow down in the country—I'm not quite certain whether he married her or not—I only heard her story afterward. Then he ran away from her. She came up to London, and got married again."

"What, a third time?"

"Well, what was she to do? She'd run away from her first, and her second had run away from her, and so she took up with another. Well, he died. He was a sailor, too. Polly always liked sailors. Only this one used to whack her when he come home drunk, and I think Polly often enough regretted her first."

"About the first. Do you know if he is alive, and where to find him?"

"I do sir," said Mrs. Kneebone, "and Polly doesn't. At least, I know where to look for him: and he was alive when I was at Poplar last, because I heard about him from some old pals of his."

"What did you say his name is?"

"Don't you think I've earned the five pounds, sir?"

Dick pushed them across the table.

"Thank you kindly, sir. His name, sir, is Bowker: Cap'en Bowker—good gentleman. And I'll tell you where you can find all about him; and I'm sure you'll consider it an extra."

"Look here," said Dick, flushing—nothing in all his life ever gave him so much joy as the story of his

wife's progress through life—"if all you say is true, this will be the best day's work you ever did. Now I'm going to pay you what Polly owes for the boy—five and thirty shillings. Here you are. Next, I'm going to take away little Bill."

She threw up her arms in an ecstasy of grief and lamentation.

"Take away my Bill? Take away my little boy Bill, that I raised with my own hands? Oh! sir, I couldn't let him go—I couldn't really; not under five pounds, sir."

"She never giv' me nothin', and she's allus whackin' me when Thoozy isn't by," said the object of the more than maternal solicitude.

Thoozy interrupted her, authoritatively bringing his crutch handle on the floor.

"You're a-goin' to let him go for nothink at all," he remarked, quietly—"so there ain't no more to be said. Hold *your* jaw. Bill, old chap, the big swell's a-goin' to take you away. He looks as if he was the sort to give you clothes, and make you respectable. Don't cry, because it's all for your own benefit; and he seems a good un, though he *is* so precious big."

"Come, Bill," said Dick, "will you come with me? Say good-bye to your friends, and come along. Old woman, you've had your money. Here, Thoozy, is your share."

"Don't cry, Bill," said Thoozy again, beginning to cry himself—"as it's all for the best. And what's for the best, you know, is got to be done, if it's physikin' the babbies, or a washin' of 'em."

Amid the tears of Thoozy and the lamentations of Mrs. Kneebone, Dick bore off his prize. Arrived at

the foot of the stairs, they heard a curious noise above, as of heavy blows and wrestling.

"What are they doing, Bill?"

Here came thuds and groans.

"They're a givin' of it to one another. She wants to grab all the tin. Listen. Hooray! Thoozy's got his crutch. She was always a whackin' me awful, till he got the stick. Now she's a catchin' it. Oh, ain't Thoozy a good un, just!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THEY went away, Dick holding the boy by the hand. He did not in the least know what to do with the child. He had taken him away by an impulse, thinking of the great fun it would be to carry Polly's own child down to Market Basing, and present him to his mother. But for the present, he found himself in a comparatively respectable part of London, with a ragged little unwashed *gamin* on his hands, not knowing what to do next. It was altogether an embarrassing position.

"As for the boy," he thought, looking down at the little mite holding his hand, "I suppose he must be washed and dressed. But who's to do it? And as for Polly—upon my word, Polly, there's a heavy reckoning against you. I suppose I must go and find a lawyer. Bill, my boy, you're dirty, you know, and ragged—where shall we go to get you washed?"

"Dunno. Never was washed."

"Well, then, where can we go to get some new clothes?"

"Dunno. Never had no new clothes. I say, you go to the pawnbroker's—that's the place," said Bill, speaking from his own experience, and brightening up a little.

Dick stopped a policeman, who stared at the child with hungry eyes, apparently disappointed at finding that he was not to "run him in."

Bill howled dismally at the sight of the embodiment of civil power.

"I ain't done nothink," he cried, trying to escape.

"Comes of a bad lot, sir, I'm afraid; but he's never been in trouble yet."

"I want to get the boy washed and dressed. In fact," Dick explained, "I am going to take him away, and bring him up respectably."

The policeman's face brightened.

"Are you now, sir? I'm very glad to hear that, very glad indeed. They'll do what you want for you at a public-house I know, not far off. I'm just off my beat, and will go with you. So you're going to take him off the streets, are you? Well, now, that's good of you—that's real goodness and charity. The boy's got no belongings; living at an old woman's—ah, you know. If you can afford to spend the money—it is not much to rich people—take more than one. They're growing up here by hundreds. Take as many as you can afford, and put 'em to school. It'll cost money, because school ain't everything. Don't give to missionary societies and rubbish. They do tell me that three-quarters of a million a year is sent out to convert the blacks. Do you know, sir, how many boys and girls that would provide for? Fifty thousand, sir. Think of that. My son, who's a scholar, totted it up for me.

Fifty thousand! If the rich people round London only knew what was inside it, they'd be frightened. I tell you what, sir, if things is going on like this, they'll have something to be frightened about, for the roughs are getting most too strong for us. There'll be an ugly rush some day, you'll see. But people won't do anything without societies. Well, sir, if you've got money, you get up a society for rich people taking children and bringing them up respectable—to be sailors and soldiers, and even—ah! ah! and why not?—even the police force, if they've got the brains.”

“I will,” said Dick, “if ever I do start a society—which isn't likely.”

“None of your institutions, and refuges, and penitentiaries, and reformatories, and foolishness, sir. You go in for a society where the people are going to look after the children themselves, and not send them out into the world with a ticket all the rest of their lives. Who's going to get over being a reformatory boy? I hav'n't got patience with it. What I says to rich people is—don't talk about doing good, and don't belong to societies, but come down here. I'll talk to 'em; and pick out a boy and a girl, or half a dozen boys and girls, and have 'em taught, and washed, and kept respectable, and it'll be the best ticket to get into heaven that they'll find anywhere. Here's the place, sir. I'll go in with you.”

The policeman led the way, and explained what was wanted.

The boy was undressed, still crying, and put into a warm bath, Dick looking on—he was so horribly thin that every rib stuck out like a skeleton's—and for the first time in his life, thoroughly scrubbed and

washed. Then, the policeman having brought an intelligent man from a second-hand shop, with a small bundle of all sorts, he was speedily dressed in a garb which astonished and delighted him beyond measure. For it was the garb of a "swell." He put his hands into his pockets, and left off crying. "Whacking" was not imminent, at any rate.

"Now," said Dick, "let us have a good look at him."

He put the boy on the table, and pulled his face back.

His eyes were blue, his nose was snub, his mouth thin and delicate, his chin sharp-pointed and clear, his hair so light as to be almost flaxen.

"Hum!" said Dick; "they can't say you are like me, anyhow. My hair's black, my nose is straight, my mouth is full, my chin is broad and square, like all the Mortiboys. And you're not too much like your mother either, except about the eyes."

Polly's eyes were a dark blue—an unusual colour, which this boy's had. For the rest, a mere shrimp of a boy—so small that you would not take him for more than seven; but a pretty, bright-faced child, now the dirt was taken off him, with the sharp expression that a London boy always has.

But somehow the boy, now he was dressed, had the look of a gentleman. There was no coarseness in his features or his expression; his eyes had a dreamy, far-off look, which is seldom seen in any but home-bred boys; his mouth was tremulous and sensitive. It was only when he spoke that his street education showed itself.

Dick paid for his accommodation at the public-house,

thanked his friend the policeman, and took his prize away with him.

"How old are you, Bill?"

"Ten next January."

"Did you hear us talking about your mother just now?"

"Yes; but I never seen her."

"Would you like to see her?"

"Not if she's like Mother Kneebone. I'd rather stay with you."

"Suppose, Bill, you were to stay with me, and you were to see a woman called Polly Tresler?"

"That's her name?"

"Yes. And suppose she were to ask you questions, do you think you'd let out anything about Mother Kneebone?"

Bill looked up sharply.

"I'm fly," he said. "I won't let out nothink. Dam if I do."

"I say, young 'un, don't say *dam* again, because the swells never do that till they're grown up. It isn't wicked then, I suppose."

At his lodgings, Lafleur was waiting for him.

"What have you here, Dick—what new game is on?"

"Only a little game of euchre with a woman. And this is the Right Bower, though he don't look like it. I'm going to win it: the stakes are worth having, I can tell you."

"You always win everything, though he certainly does not look much like a winning card. Give him something to eat."

Dick rang the bell, and consigned the child to his

landlady, with injunctions to give him plenty to eat and drink.

When he came home that night, at twelve, he found the boy curled up on the hearth-rug, sound asleep. He carried him into his bed-room, undressed him, and laid him in bed. Bill opened his eyes for a moment; but not understanding the position of things, thought it was a queer dream, and went sound off to sleep again.

In the morning, Dick found him still asleep. He had curled his lean arms round Dick's neck, and laid his little cheeks in Dick's big beard, thinking he was in bed with Thoozy.

"Poor little cuss!" said Dick.

That morning he went to a lawyer, one whose name he had heard from Mr. Battiscombe at Market Basing. To him he confided the whole story of his marriage and Polly's wicked goings-on.

They had a long consultation, after which Dick strode away with a lightened countenance.

Bill was washed and dressed ready for him when he came back. The landlady was also ready with a representation. The boy was not in the agreement, and the trouble he gave was to be considered. Dick considered it. Then she begged to call Mr. Mortiboy's attention to the language in which he expressed his ideas—

"Which," she said, "is truly awful. If I had my boys home from school, they shouldn't stay in the same house with him, not for gold."

She shook her finger at Bill, who looked at his protector to see whether he was going to be "whacked." But Mr. Mortiboy only laughed.

"We shall cure him presently, I dare say. Bring him his dinner as soon as you can. Hungry, Bill?"

"I'm allus hungry," said the boy.

When his dinner came, which was also Dick's luncheon, Bill made a rush at the dish as soon as the cover was taken off. Chops! He seized one in his fingers, and ran to a corner of the room, where he fell to tearing it with his teeth, after the manner of a menagerie tiger. The landlady pointed out this conduct to her tenant.

"That's the way he had his supper last night, sir. A regular little savage."

Dick nodded, and laughed. The woman retired. As she shut the door, the urchin, encouraged by the approving smiles of his patron, as he thought, performed a Catherine Wheel all round the room, with the bone of his mutton-chop in his mouth, finishing off with a "Houp-là!" as he had done the day before. Then he went back to his corner, and gnawed the bone.

"Bill, take the bone out of your mouth, and sit down on that chair. Did you never sit down to table in your life?"

"Eh?"

"How did you get your dinner at Mrs. Knee-bone's?"

"Never had no dinner. Morning, mother made tea for herself, and sometimes I got some if Thoozy was able to get up. When Thoozy had rheumatics dreadful bad, so that he couldn't get up, I only got a bit of bread. Went out all day on the cadge. If I got nothing, old Mother Kneebone giv' me a whackin' and another bit of bread. When Thoozy was all right, I

got on first-rate. Thoozy used to help hisself and me too."

"Well, now you've got to learn manners."

Bill then received his first lesson in the usages of polite society—in teaching him which, as it was a novel occupation, Dick found the afternoon slip away pleasantly enough.

"Nobody ever taught you anything, I suppose?"

"Only Thoozy. He used to read to me. He's awful clever—knows everything. He promised to learn me to read as soon as he could find time. Once I was took up by a lady and put to school. It was a Sunday, because the bells were ringing, and the swells going to church. There was a bun and a cup of tea—jolly!—and then they taught us. I went lots of times on Sundays. They told me to say prayers and to sing hymns. I sang one at home they taught me, but old Mother Kneebone took a stick, and said she'd break every bone in my body if I didn't give over."

"They never taught you your duty, I suppose," said the moral Dick.

"What's that? There was a man in a straight black gownd said we was all going—Thoozy and me, and all the lot—to hell."

"That's good news to tell a child," said Dick.

"So I told Thoozy; and I asks him where it is, and what it's like when you've got there. He ups and says, 'If it ain't better than Paragon Place, it won't be very jolly for us, Bill. Let's hope there'll be plenty to eat, and no Mother Kneebone.' Then I thought I should like to go there. But Thoozy said school wasn't no good."

Presently, the boy, unaccustomed to a chop and

half a glass of beer, fell into a profound slumber; and Dick smoked on, thinking what he was to do with him.

He stayed one week in town, having interviews with the lawyers, and making out his case against Polly. This was not, with the data they had to go upon, at all a difficult task. After a few days, the story ran much as Mrs. Kneebone had told him.

Polly, at the age of eighteen, had gone up to London into service. She made certain female friends who had belongings at Poplar, where she went on her "Sundays out." There she fell in with the mate of a sailing ship, a man twenty-five years older than herself, who was attracted by her rosy cheeks and bright eyes, and married her. According to Mrs. Kneebone—who ought to know something of feminine nature—the main cause of the conjugal unhappiness which ensued was that Polly despised a man who allowed his wife to beat him. No doubt there was a certain amount of truth in Mrs. Kneebone's remark: far be it from me to suggest suspicion as to any statement made by a woman in most respects so admirable. But this was not all the truth. When Captain Bowker went away, he left, in lieu of a monthly allowance from the shippers, which most merchant skippers' wives draw, a sum of money equivalent to it, calculated to last during the period of his absence. It must be observed that Polly was, if I may coin the term, a pseudo-maniac: she lied habitually, and even causelessly. Had she been of a higher rank in life, she would have become, of course, a novelist, drawing from her imagination some of that superfluous energy which prompted her now to invent, whenever invention appeared not only profitable, but even

amusing. She had, in obedience to this proclivity, lied about herself and her belongings to her husband. Bowker had been told by her that she came from Cumberland. Why from Cumberland? I don't know. Polly only knew that it was a long way off, so she said Cumberland; and as her husband had never been there, it answered as well as any other place.

When Captain Bowker had been away for about a year—that is, for more than half of his appointed time—Polly bethought herself that she ought to go to Market Basing, and pay a visit to her parents. She went; found her father dead, and her mother on the point of going to the workhouse; stayed there—promising at first for a few weeks only. But weeks passed into months; and when her husband returned—bringing a parcel of Chinese silks for his wife, and a parrot that knew how to cough and swear, having learned these accomplishments from a consumptive mariner—he found his house there, and “all standing,” as he expressed it, but no Polly. Nor could he light upon any traces of his Polly. First, because he was a warm-hearted man, he shed tears, and wrung the neck of the parrot for swearing at him. Next, he thanked the Lord for being rid of a bad lot, sold the sticks, paid the rent, and went to sea again.

Then something happened to Polly. She met Dick Mortiboy: fell in with him in the fields as he was walking home from Parkside to Derngate; met him again—met him every night; saw that the boy was madly in love with her; encouraged him, but gave herself all the airs of a *vertu farouche*; received his presents; and then

* * * * *

Bigamy. It is an ugly word. Polly said it over

and over to herself about this time. It means all sorts of unpleasantness: it conveys ideas of courts, policemen, prison, an unbecoming uniform, a diet rather plain than luxurious, compulsory early rising, a limited circle of friends, very few books to read. A very ugly word. But bigamy without the danger? to marry twice and not to be found out? to marry the son of the richest man in the town so that the sailor husband should never know? This seemed a prize worth risking something for. And what did she risk? Nothing. She asked her mother. Nothing, repeated the old lady. How could Bowker find out? He was bound to go to sea: He was always afloat: he was twenty years older than herself: he might get drowned—most likely he would get drowned—perhaps he was drowned already. And then she would have her new husband clear to herself.

And the son of the richest man in the town!

Young Dick pressed her. In his imagination, the fresh-cheeked, rosy village girl, who said she was eighteen when she was five-and-twenty, was an angel. Dick was a fool, of course: but many men have been fools at nineteen. He pressed her to promise to marry him. She promised. That meant nothing, because she could always break off. But his father sent him up to town to work for a time in a London bank, and—and—alas! for Polly's vow—it succumbed; and one fine morning she walked up the aisle of St. Pancras Church, and was married to Dick Mortiboy.

"Bigamy," said Dick, chuckling—"bigamy! That's a very pretty rod to hold over my Polly's head. And the worthy sailor still alive."

When Dick disappeared there were two courses open to his afflicted wife. She might go to Mr. Mortiboy, and proclaim herself his daughter-in-law; or she might go back to her Bowker. She reasoned out the matter with her mother; and, by her advice, elected to return to her first husband. The two reasons which the experienced matron, her mamma, urged were—first, that if Bowker found her out, it would lead to criminal proceedings and great unpleasantness; secondly, that if she told Mr. Mortiboy, he would infallibly, so angry would he be, refuse to afford her any assistance whatever. So she went to Poplar. Captain Bowker, her old friends told her, was gone to the China Seas in the country trade: would not be back for five years. Further, he had left a message that, if Polly came back, she was to be told that he was quit of her, and that she was henceforth no wife of his. That formula constitutes a nautical divorce. So Polly had to abandon hopes in that direction. Of course, she might, had she known, have gone to the shippers in whose employ her husband was, and demanded an allowance as his wife. She did not know their names. Then she fell in love for the first time. It was also with a sailor, one William Flint, ship's carpenter by profession, who so far overcame her scruples of conscience as to lead her to the altar a third time. Mr. Flint was the father of little Bill. He died before the birth of his son, after a short period of matrimonial happiness, during which he effectually taught Polly the beauty of submission by means of a thick stick. Mrs. Flint, thus bereft of two husbands and widowed of a third, left her child in care of Mrs. Kneebone, and lived in London for some years, still single, though not

without admirers. When, like Horace's Lydia, she ceased to hear them knock at her door, she retired to Market Basing, where the rest of her history is known.

"The whole case," said the lawyer, after exposing the principal facts, "is as simple as possible. Bowker still lives, and has a pension from his employers. We can put our hands upon him whenever you please. The woman committed bigamy in marrying you. You may proceed against her if you like. Bowker may get a divorce if he pleases. The boy is no more yours than he is mine."

"Thank you," said Dick. "I'll wait a week or so, and think things over. I suppose I couldn't marry again without making any fuss about it?"

"You might, certainly; but you had better not just yet. Put yourself wholly in our hands, my dear sir."

Dick went away thoughtful. He was not altogether satisfied. Polly was a bad lot—a very bad lot. At the same time, it seemed mean to put her into prison, and bring her to utter shame and misery. He was always tender to criminals—not from any self-compunctions or prickings of conscience, but chiefly from the mental attitude of resistance to law into which his roving years had put him. Could not a compromise be effected? Suppose she were to go away, and be silent about it all? Suppose—but, in short, he would wait a little.

Then he thought of Grace. Free, free at last! The follies of his youth trampled down and forgotten! Love before him, and a peaceful life, such as he yearned after, away in some garden of pleasant England, hand in hand with Grace! Polly's chance was slender.

He went home to little Bill. It took some days to teach the child that mankind at large, though strangers, were not his mortal enemies. He learned the smaller lessons—those of propriety and the habits of civilization—easily enough, because he had nothing to unlearn, never having had any manners at all. He was a gentle child, too—submissive and docile. His worst difficulty, of course, was his language, which he readily perceived was not the same as that employed by his patron. He used to listen to what people said, and then go away and imitate them in a corner—gestures, and voice, and all. A perfectly wild boy: as untaught—save from the few lessons which he had got from Thoozy—as regards the outer world, as if he had been born in a desert and reared on the top of a mountain. A boy whose mind was like wax to receive impressions—a blank waxen tablet, for the stylus of Dick to work upon. Bad things he knew, after a fashion; but as they had never been called bad to him, of course it did not matter. As Euripides has explained, we only know what is bad by the canon of what is good. Good and bad were alike to little Bill.

In a day or two, the little animal was as fond of his patron and as entirely trustful in him as if he had been a dog. He ran about after him; he curled up at his feet if he sat down; he climbed upon his knees; he sat up solemnly, and stared at him; he listened to all he said, and repeated it to himself. And Dick gave him, in that week which was spent in completing the “case” against Polly, a whole volume of moral philosophy, and a complete sheaf of moral axioms.

Mindful of the untrustworthy character of the Church Catechism, from the evidence he had received

of it—he had not read it since he was a boy—he composed a short one for himself, which he asked the boy daily.

“What is a boy’s first duty, Bill?”

“Never steal, never tell lies, never swear, hold his jaw, do his work, go away from England, and get on.”

He numbered his commandments off on his fingers, and went through them glibly enough.

“Right, boy. When I was your age, they used to teach me the Ten Commandments; but somehow they didn’t seem to stick. I didn’t want to worship graven images, so it was no good telling me not. Boys do prig, Bill, and don’t get found out. They go on prigg-ing, and then they do get found out. Then you know what happens.

“The thing to do is to persuade people to trust you. Show that you are able to get on, and you will. Whatever you do, Bill, put your back into it. I knew a poor creature in the States who was always having chances, and always failing, because he never had the pluck to take them. He had the fever last time I saw him, in a poor, mean sort of way. Hadn’t the pluck to shake like other people.

“Here’s another commandment for you, Bill. *Always be ready to fight.* It’s the fighting men get the best of it. If a boy insults you, up with your fist. People are mostly cowards. If you make them afraid, they’ll do anything. Remember that, Bill.

“Never you trust people that go round cracking you up to your face. If I wanted to get something out of you, I should say, ‘Bill, you’re a pretty boy, and a nice behaved boy.’ As I want to do you good, I say,

‘Bill, you’re a thin, mealy-faced little devil, without enough strength to squeeze the life out of a mosquito.’ You’ll be no good till you’re fat and strong, and know how to talk, and to behave, and to read. You remember that, Bill.

“You’ll have to go to school soon, my boy. I’m not going to have you taught a lot of rubbish, on pretence of improving your intellect, because the masters don’t know anything else. You’ll learn to talk French and German; you’ll learn music; you’ll learn to ride, and to fence, and to box; and you’ll learn all the science you can get stuffed into you. But no Latin, my boy, and no rubbish.

“Keep your eyes wide open, Bill, for shams and humbugs. Everybody in England, almost, is a humbug. You’ll have to make money, and you can’t do it, if you stay here, without pretending and telling lies. When you get big, old chap, you and I will go away to the West, and make a clearing, and grow our own crops. That’s real, at any rate. Remember that, Bill.

“Don’t be in a hurry to fall in love. Wait till you are five-and-twenty before you think about a girl at all. Then get married as soon as you can. When we get to Market Basing, I’ll show you the kind of girl you may fall in love with. You remember that.

“Never be satisfied *till you’ve got all you want*. Rich people teach the poor to be humble and contented. That’s because they want to keep what they’ve got. If you see a man humble, *kick him till he’s proud*. And if you see a man contented, have him locked up in a lunatic asylum.

“I remember once, out there, we caught a man in the act of horse-stealing. Some were for hanging him.

‘Don’t do that,’ I said. ‘Let’s tar and feather him.’ So we did; and when the job was finished—he really looked beautiful—we made him dance a breakdown. The poor devil was frightened, and looked as miserable as if the rope was round his neck. So one of the crowd shouts out to him, ‘Dance jolly,’ he says—‘dance jolly; or, by the powers, we’ll hang you.’ That man instantly looked as jolly as if it was all fun and jokes—face wreathed with smiles, as the books say. I never saw a better breakdown. So, if you see a man humble, you kick him till he’s proud. Remember that, Bill.

“One man’s as good as another, Bill. Don’t you be afraid of a man because he’s got a carriage, and a different coat to yours. He’s only better than you if he’s stronger, and has got better brains.

“Never you take a thing on trust. A man on board the boat from America wanted to persuade me about his religious notions. Said they were Bishop somebody’s. That’s all he had to believe them by. Bill, it’s a mighty poor way of knowing things, if you believe all they tell you. Some day I’ll tell you what a priest in Mexico wanted me to believe.

“Manners, my boy. Get manners as soon as you can. They help a man more than anything else. Always be polite to everybody; but if you want anything, let them know it at starting. It saves a great deal of fighting. As I told you, if you have manners to start with, and pluck to back your demands, you’ll get on.”

The sermons, of which these are only notes, were not all delivered in a single day, or in a single week.

They are inserted here to indicate the nature of the course of philosophy which Dick was putting his young pupil through. From time to time he examined him; added to the commandment which formed his catechism; illustrated his position by anecdotes; made a sort of running commentary on his teaching, or gave the boy an exercise on some knotty point.

All this excellent moral teaching we are fain to pass over, because space and time are limited. Anybody who wants to know more of Dick's teaching may purchase his aphorisms of me, on moderate terms, to be mutually agreed upon.

CHAPTER XV.

It was in a very changed mood that Dick went back to Market Basing; one that boded little good to Polly. He went back rejoicing in his freedom. He could try once more for his cousin, Grace Heathcote. If she accepted he would—what would he do?—write to his lawyers to get his marriage with Polly Tresler annulled in the quickest manner, and at any cost.

With him, of course, went little Bill. Dick had got him dressed in a fantastic garb of his own invention, consisting chiefly of brown velvet and gold lace, in which the child looked wonderfully beautiful. I said before that he had the look of a gentleman. It was more than this: he had that look of refinement and intelligence which might have been produced in a boy of extraordinary talent by a course of the most careful training, the highest kind of education. He was now almost presentable: he had ascertained most of

the words which are *tapu*: he was convinced that his original theories as to the nature of women, based on his experience of Mrs. Kneebone, were erroneous, or at least not capable of general application; he did not take to his heels when he saw a policeman; he ate and drank like a Christian. The only thing which made him sometimes troublesome was that he really did not know how, without using *tapu* words, to express his ideas. And he sometimes, by imitating exactly what he saw others do, provoked the observer's smile, or stimulated his curiosity.

Dick denied himself his cigar in the train, thinking that the smell of a smoking-carriage might be bad for the boy. Consequently there were ladies in the carriage; two young ladies who whispered to each other, and shot telegraphic signals about nothing out of the corners of their eyes, and an old one. The old lady fell to admiring the boy. She looked at him for a long time, and could not resist the impulse to talk to him.

"Your son, may I ask, sir?" she said to Dick.

"My ward, madam."

"Come to me, my dear. I've got a grandson something like him." She drew the child to her knee. Little Bill looked wistfully at Dick. "What is your name, my dear?"

"Bill."

"Y—e—s—William—a pretty name."

"'Taint William. It's Bill."

"Dear me!" thought the old lady; "this is a very vulgar child. Now talk to me, my dear," she said aloud.

This was a staggerer for little Bill. He was not

anxious now to answer questions, being quite aware that his previous history, though not discreditable perhaps, had yet been unfortunate. He was silent for a little, and then, unfortunately recollecting exactly what he had seen his patron's landlady in London do one afternoon when she brought up the bill, he slipped off the old lady's knee, and, striking an attitude, half deprecating, half assertive, he coughed behind his hand, and murmured—

"It was not always thus with me. I have had happier days."

Then he placed his hand on his heart, and sighed deeply. Then he looked at Dick, to see if he had done anything wrong.

In a word the boy was a little monkey—just as imitative—just as quick and clever.

"God bless my soul!" cried the old lady; "what an extraordinary child!"

The two young ladies screamed. Dick laughed. And the boy, seeing their amusement, jumped up and down, laughing too.

"Pardon him, madam," said Dick. "By an unlucky series of accidents, my ward's education has been totally neglected. Sit here, my boy, and do not let us talk any more."

No one was in the villa to receive them. Dick took the boy by the hand, and led him into the house. All the magnificence bewildered him.

"Do you live here, Uncle Dick?"

"This is my house, Bill; and here you and I will live together as jolly as we can. Come upstairs. Now this, my boy, is to be your room. There isn't a bed

in it at present, but I will get you one. It is your own room. We shall have you taught to read and write; and then you shall have books, if you take to books—as I expect you will. And now—I wish you could ride—we will have a little drive into the country together.”

The groom brought round Dick’s dog-cart, and they drove off.

First, to the bank. Bill trotted in after his protector, following him like a little dog.

“Who is this?” asked Ghrimes.

“This is little Bill—William Flint, by name, adopted ward of Mr. Dick Mortiboy. Don’t look suspicious, Ghrimes.”

“Indeed, I was not thinking anything of the sort.”

Dick transacted his business, which did not take long, and went out. He took the road to Hunslope. People looked at the cart with astonishment. What new thing had happened? Young Mr. Mortiboy with a child beside him! Polly, standing at the door of her mother’s cottage, saw him drive past. Saw the boy, too, and wondered. During this interval she had been full of fear, and uncertainty, and rage. It was not fear of “the other” turning up; it was bodily fear of being killed if she offended her husband. She resolved to go at least to the villa that very evening, and have it out. Not a thought of little Bill!

“Oh, what a pretty boy!” cried Grace. “Lucy come and look. Who is he, Dick?”

“He’s my ward, now. A week ago he was anybody’s ward, running about the streets. I’ve had him cleaned and new rigged, you see, and I don’t think he looks amiss. Shake hands as I taught you, Bill.

Grace, come and talk to me for five minutes in the garden. Lucy, take care of the boy, will you? Give him a lesson in good behaviour."

Grace saw that he had something of importance to say, and led the way to the garden without another word. It was one of those old-fashioned gardens, where you are sure of finding all the old flowers side by side with the best of the new—mignonette, wall-flower, sweet-William, Venus's looking-glass, polyanthus, London pride, and the rest. At the end lay a sort of little shrubbery, behind which again was an arbour.

"Come into the arbour, Grace," said Dick.

He was looking wonderfully serious and thoughtful,—his firm lips twitching with some anxieties, his eyes cast down.

He motioned to Grace to go in and sit down, but she remained standing outside.

They were behind the shrubbery, and hidden from the house.

"You remember the scene at the cross, Grace?"

"I have spoken to no one about it."

"I knew you would not. You found out then two secrets of my life, both of which I wanted to hide from you;—one, that I love you; the other that I am married already. Since that night, Grace, I have made a discovery."

"What is it, Dick?"

"That I can free myself, Grace—that I am free already. I can be divorced. The marriage was not a real one. I am certain of that. The obstacle exists no longer—or will exist no longer in a very short time. All that my money can do to further the separation of that woman from me shall be done. I have told the

lawyers to spare no trouble to hunt up every atom and scrap of her life—to ferret out every secret she ever had. I shall hold myself up to ridicule in the papers, perhaps. What does that matter? Who cares for a day's notoriety? Free I *will* be—free I *must* be.”

“I should like to congratulate you, Dick; but it seems all so dreadful. Are you quite sure? Oh, Dick, don't be cruel to—to an innocent woman.”

“Am I sure? Grace, I could send her into court at once, to-day, with my evidence in my hands. But I will not: I will wait for more. How bad that woman is, you could never know, you could never even suspect. Bad wife of a bad husband. We were fitly mated then—we are not fitly mated now. And she must go.” His face was stern and hard. Suddenly it lit up again, and he burst into one of those quaint, soft laughs of his which made every one else laugh too. His laugh was as infectious as another person's yawn. “I forgot to tell you, Grace. Such fun! After you went away, I met her again by the river. She had been drinking more, and said something or other which made me in a rage, I believe. At all events, I took her by the arms, and chucked her in.”

“Dick!—you might have drowned her.”

“Yes. I didn't think of that till she was at the bottom, and I saw the bubbles coming up—her bubbles! But there was no fear. Bless you, she came to the top, and floated like a cork. You should have seen her face when she came out!”

Dick told the story quite simply, as if it was the most natural thing in the world that he should throw his wife into the river. Grace looked at him with

astonishment, and then began to laugh as well. It was impossible to treat Dick like an ordinary creature.

"Now look here, Grace, my dear," Dick went on. "I offended you at the cross, and behaved like a—like a—mean Mexican, with my love, and my fury, and all the rest of it. I'm very sorry and ashamed. Tell me again I am forgiven."

"Of course you are forgiven, Dick."

"Yes; I was mad then because of Polly. But she's as good as gone now, and I am mad no more. And——the truth remains, Grace, that I love you more than all the world together. It is all exactly as I told you a fortnight ago."

"But you mustn't love me, Dick. I belong to somebody else."

"Must not love you, my dear? Why, Grace, you might as well tell me I must not eat or drink. Not love you when I see you, and talk to you, and take your hand in mine—this little hand"—he took it as he spoke, and held it in his, Grace only looking him straight in the face: "this little hand. Why, Grace, do you think I am made of stone?"

"Indeed, I am sure you are not, Dick. But do you think I am a woman to give her word one day, and recall it the next? Is that fair, Dick?"

"It would be if you loved me. I should not care unless you were to take away your word from me, Grace. All is fair in love."

"No; but I do not love you, Dick—I never can love you. Listen, and I will tell you all my secrets. I talk to you because you love me, as I can talk to no one else. And because I trust you, Dick, I tell you what I can hardly tell my own sister. Indeed she

would not understand me." She laid her hand in his—it rested on the back of the garden seat. "Dick, do you remember what you told me—how you tremble when I touch you? It is all exactly the same with me. When I hear Frank's step—I never do now; but I say now, because I dream of it still—I tremble all over. When he comes near me, I feel all the blood rushing to my face. If he touches me, my pulses beat. If I see his handwriting, my hand shakes. If I awake at night, thinking of him, I do not want to sleep any more, and lie patiently, praying to God for him. When I pass their dear old house, I cannot keep my tears down. When I have nothing to do, I go to the lane—see there: you are tall, and can look over the hedge: it is in the lane beyond the next field—where he first told me he loved me, and sit down, and think it all over again. Oh, Dick, such a cold day it was!—and yet we were so warm: such a snowy, frosty, windy day in January, and yet I was so glad and happy! I never knew that I loved him until he told me that he loved me, and then I knew—oh, in a moment I knew, that there could be no other man in all the world for me but Frank. Dear Dick, I love you too, but not in this way. See—I can give you my hand without trembling. I can see you coming without my pulses beating faster. I read you all my heart: more, more than I could ever, I think, tell to Frank. I tell you to make you leave off loving me."

Dick shook his head. He was sitting down now, on the garden seat, holding her hand in his. He stooped and kissed it.

"Dick—dear Dick!—don't be cruel to me. Mamma

is unkind because she wants you to marry me, and says that I don't encourage you."

Dick laughed ruefully.

"I don't want any encouragement, Grace."

"Everything seems somehow dark and gloomy. Don't be cruel, Dick. Be my dear old Dick, like you were years ago, before you went away, when I was a little thing, and you a big boy. I can never love you, Dick. Let me say it again and again, and over and over, so that you may believe me at last. Then, if I were to marry you, how would it be with you? How should you like your wife to be brooding over her ruined lover, and trying to do a cold-hearted duty by her husband? Dick, it would be wicked. It would kill me—it would drive you mad. Don't ask me—don't ask me, my cousin, for I love my Frank."

She stopped now because she could not go on any longer, and her voice broke down. Dick's head was bent above her hand, and he said nothing. Presently a tear—only one—of the largest size consistent with the laws which guide the formation of drops, fell upon her hand. Grace had made her lover weep. Since his mother died, he had shed no tear. They stood so for some minutes.

Five minutes before this, Mrs. Heathcote, returning home, found Lucy with the boy.

"It is Dick's new *protégé*," she explained. "Grace and he are in the garden."

"*Protégé!*—stuff and nonsense!" said Mrs. Heathcote. "What does Dick want with children?"

She went to the back of the house, and looked out into the garden. No Grace there. Then she stepped

softly across the lawn, and heard voices behind the shrubbery. She stopped and listened. She heard the words, "Don't ask me, my cousin. I love my Frank;" and, turning pale, hurried back to the house. She could not speak.

Presently Dick lifted his head with a smile. Grace knew then that she had won the battle.

"I give you up, Grace, dear. All the same, I love you still. But I will never again speak—of love to you. That, at least, I promise."

"You must promise me more, Cousin Dick."

"What more? I will promise you anything you like to ask, child Grace."

"Help Frank."

"Yes, my sister," answered Dick, humbly.

"Am I your sister? Then Frank is your brother, Dick. You must help your brother."

"Let me kiss you once, my dear. Let me have one kiss."

He took her head in his hands, and kissed her—solemnly, not passionately—on forehead and cheek. She disengaged herself, blushing and confused, with the tears in her eyes. What was she that this man—so good so kind—should love her so?

"There was a solemn oath in every kiss, Grace. You may trust me, for Frank and yourself, to the death. You are both mine. Tell me only what I am to do first."

"I will find his address from Kate, Dick, and then—oh, then we shall know what to do."

"I know what to do already," cried Dick, his face brightening up like a corn-field after a cloud has

passed over it. "I know already what you would all like. We will make him a partner in the bank—Ghrimes and Frank together—and revive the old name. It shall be Melliship, Mortiboy & Co.—just as before. Eh, Grace? What a rage the old man would be in if he only knew it! Ho! ho!"

He laughed—with his jolly, mellow voice—as lightly as a boy, and with no sign of the emotion which had just possessed him, and left her. Mrs. Heathcote was gone to her own room. Lucy was sitting with the boy, who stared at her with great eyes, as a vision of another world. Taking him away, he drove back to Market Basing.

Mrs. Heathcote, too angry at first to speak, went back to the house and tried to think. Should she tell her husband? Should she remonstrate with Grace? What good would it do? They were both too obstinate to receive remonstrance with favour. She would only make things worse. Should she speak to Lucy? What use? So she had to keep it to herself, consoling herself with the thought that, after all, it was early days; perhaps Dick might propose again; perhaps Grace might not be always obdurate; perhaps Frank Melliship would "do something." Nevertheless, it was a cruel blow to overhear the rejection of half a million of money.

In the evening of the same day, Polly, not without a good deal of misgiving and consultation with her mother, went up to the villa, in order to have it out with her husband. She resolved for herself to assume an aggressive attitude, and meditated a line of action which she considered would prove most effective with Dick. First, she put on all her best things; then she

stuck a pistol—it was only an old single-barrelled thing which she had by her—in her pocket; and under her shawl she carried the family carving-knife. Then she walked boldly over the bridge which arched the river half a mile above the villa, stepped across the fields, and knocked at Dick's door.

The proprietor of the house opened it.

"I thought you would turn up to-night. Pray come in, Polly. We will talk inside."

He spoke with so much politeness that Polly smelt mischief. But she followed without saying a word. He led the way to the smoking-room, where sat little Bill in his gorgeous attire.

"Who's that boy?" asked Polly.

"We'll come to him directly," said Dick. "Now, Polly, the game's played out, and you'd better throw up the cards."

"What do you mean, Dick? If you think I'm going to be murdered quietly, you're just mistaken; so see here!"

She took out her pistol and carving-knife, and standing with the table between them, brandished the weapons in his face with the air of a heroine at the Adelphi.

"Pretty toys—very pretty toys," said her husband. "No, Polly, I'm not going to murder you. As an old friend, I should perhaps advise you to make tracks. But, after all, you needn't do that, because you are quite certain to be followed."

She stared at him, wondering, with a sinking heart, what was to follow.

"Carry your memory back twelve years and three-quarters. Is it done?"

"It is. What little lark are you up to now, Dick?"

"What do you see?"

"I see you and me walking up the aisle of St. Pancras' Church."

"St. Pancras' Church. Very good indeed. Now carry your memory two years and three-quarters or so farther on. Where are we on a certain Monday about that time?"

She assumed a sulky and stubborn air. But she turned pale, notwithstanding.

"I don't know. How am I to remember so long ago?"

"You need not remember unless you like, you know. Well, let us have another question, and I have done. Carry your memory back to Limehouse Church, two years before the St. Pancras business."

This time she reeled as if she had been struck. For a space she did not answer.

Then she murmured, with dry lips—

"Prove it—prove it. You can't do it."

"Polly, the game's up. It's all come out. I'm trying now to find out the best way of getting rid of my marriage without, if you fall in with my views, bringing you before a court of law. Because you see, Polly, you've committed a very pretty bigamy. Bowker was alive when you married me, and you knew it. I can prove it. He's alive now!"

Polly let the pistol and carving-knife drop, and fell down on her knees moaning and crying.

"Oh! Dick—Dick. I married you because I loved you. I did indeed—I did indeed! And I married the other man because I thought you were dead. Believe me, Dick—oh, believe me and forgive me!"

She was serious in her grief at heart, because Dick represented money and ease to her. Besides, in her way—her coarse, rough way—she really loved the man.

"Forgive you?" said Dick. "I don't quite understand what you mean by forgiving. I'll forgive you fast enough as soon as we're divorced: not a moment before, if you pray on your knees from this till midnight. Get up, Polly, and don't be play-acting. Before your own son, too."

"My son!" She started up as if she had been shot. "My son! Oh, then, now I see who has done the mischief."

"Your son, Polly—Flint's son. Not mine at all, you know. Look at him, and tell me what you think of him."

She seized the boy, who was trembling with terror, and held him under the lamp to look at him.

"Uncle Dick," he cried, "don't let her have me."

"He's my boy—he's my son. I shall take him away."

"No you don't, Polly. That's one of my conditions. Prisoners are not allowed, remember, to have their children in gaol with them. Now, listen to me. For the present, and until I have decided what to do, you go away from Market Basing. I don't care where you go to. My lawyers will give you a pound a week to live on: always understand that it is only for the present. You tell no one here anything: if you do, you go to gaol the next day. The boy remains with me. You write out to-morrow morning and give me a full confession, stating that you knew Bowker to be alive when you married me."

"I won't," cried the woman. "And I'll have my boy."

"That is what you will do," said Dick, unmoved. "If you break through any part of these conditions, you know the consequences. The whole story of your life is known to me. Your eight years in London, Polly—what do you think of that? Everything will be published in open court, and you will go off to gaol for a couple of years or ten years. And where will you be when you come out?"

"I'll kill Mother Kneebone," she hissed.

"That's as you please. Do anything you like with that old lady; but you will be hanged if you do, you know."

Polly wavered, and loosed her hold of the child, who instantly slipped behind Dick's legs for protection.

"Here is money to take you to London. Here is the address of the lawyers, to whom you will go for your weekly allowance. I shall write to them to-night. If you do not appear here before midday to-morrow to make your written confession, I shall write to them to take out the warrant that will send you to prison. Now go."

She took the paper and the money, and went away without a word or a sign.

CHAPTER XVI.

POLLY went home to her mother. The dear old lady, in spite of Polly's assertion, had heard the truth about the ducking, and rejoiced, because it gave her daughter, as she thought, an opportunity of threatening reprisals.

Before she left on her errand of frightening Dick, her mother advised her—

"Don't you be afraid, Polly—he can't kill you. He calls hisself a gentleman, so I suppose he won't beat you. You stick up to him. Tell him you'll blare it all over the town. Threaten him, my gal. Don't never let out that you're afraid of him. If he won't come down with hush-money to keep it dark, tell him you're agoin' to git a warrant out against him for your own protection. That's the way, Polly. Give me my drops handy, against you come back."

Presently her daughter returned, but pale, startled, and faint.

"It's all up, mother," she murmured.

"What's all up, Poll? You ain't been such a fool as to let out that you was afraid, have you?"

"It's no use being afraid or not, now. It's all up, mother, I tell you. What you always prophesied has come. He has found out about the other two."

"Polly!—the other two? Both on 'em?"

"Both. Mother Kneebone told him. No one else could. No one else knew—unless he found out for himself. Oh, he's a devil—he's a devil!"

"Who's Mother Kneebone?"

"The woman as had the boy. Dick's got the boy

now. Says he means to keep him. I don't want the brat, I'm sure."

"The woman who had the boy," snarled her mother. "The woman that had the secrets that you wouldn't tell your own mother. Serves you right, Polly—serves you right, for not telling me everything. Why did you let Mrs. Kneebone know about yourself at all?"

"She knew all along. It's no use singing out, mother. It's all up, I tell you. I shall go to London, and you must go to the union."

The old woman fell back moaning on her pillow. As her head touched it, there was a chink of money.

"My money!" cried Polly, brightening up. "My money! Let's see how much there is."

Her mother clutched the bag from under her head, and held it tight: not tight enough, however, in her old hands to save it from her daughter, who snatched it from her grasp after a brief and unequal contest.

It was a stocking, and in the toe lay all, or nearly all, the money she had got from Dick, except what she had spent in dress.

Polly counted it out. There were fifty-five pounds, all in sovereigns. She put back fifty into the stocking, which she carefully placed in her own pocket. Then she pulled out a purse, containing fourpence in coppers and a few shillings, put four of the sovereigns in it, and gave the remaining one back to her mother, who lay back in the bed, moaning and cursing—now loud, now soft—like a gale at sea.

"Oh! that ever I had a daughter," groaned the old woman. "Oh! I wish you'd never been born. To take and send me to the union. Oh! I'm sorry that

ever I saw your face. Oh! I wish I'd drowned you when you was a baby, as I wanted to. To let her old mother go on the parish! I wish you was smothered! I wish you was dead! I wish you was transported! I wish you was hanged! I wish you was blind, and deaf, and dumb, and full of aches and pains! I do!"

She stopped, not for want of ejaculations, for her quiver was full of them, but for want of breath.

Polly, who was comparatively accustomed to these outbreaks, calmly proceeded to undress, with the design of going to bed. When her mother choked, she lifted her up, and patted her on the back to bring her round.

"You've had a good long spell out of the union, considering, mother, so you may as well make up your mind to go in quietly. Why, you must be past seventy now. It'll be good for you to have the chaplain coming round with his nice talk, and the services on Sunday. You've been a wicked old hussy, you know, and it may be the making of you, after all."

"I'm not so bad as you," cried the old woman, mad with rage. "You pepper and salt drab—you bag of wickedness—you, you—black, brazen, blaring, pitch-fire, tom-cat."

Polly heeded not. She had let down her hair, and was looking at herself in her glass. Obedient to feminine instincts, the first use she had made of the money which Dick had given her was to buy a looking-glass. She saw a large coarse face—coarse through drink—with thick lips. Her nose, which had been straight and well formed, was puffy. This was through drink. Her forehead was swollen and red. Drink

had left its mark. Her eyes alone remained—deep, large, limpid, dark blue.

“The boy has got my eyes,” she murmured with a sigh, thinking of days when she had attractions enough to catch the calf-love of young Dick Mortiboy.

Then she went to bed, her mother pursuing her with execrations as she climbed the narrow stairs. They are not written down here, because they were unparliamentary, and unbecoming the general character of woman, from whose lips *nil nisi lene* ought to proceed.

Early in the morning she came down again, shook up the old woman—not unkindly—and began putting her things together.

“Look here mother—I must go to London, you know—because else I shall have to go to prison; so it can’t be helped. You’ve got one sovereign already. I’ll give you five more—come. That’ll carry you on for a bit; and I’ll tell Mrs. Smith’s Ameliarann to come in and look after you. Let’s part friends.”

The old woman clutched the money, and Polly went away without those tender wishes and embraces which some parents lavish upon their departing children.

She was dressed in all her finery, to save the trouble of carrying the things, and had the rest of her belongings in a single bag, which she carried herself.

She went straight to the villa. Dick was already up, though it was only eight o’clock, and was waiting for her.

“Now then,” she said cheerfully, “if I’ve got to write things down, I’d better begin. No; I won’t write. I never can write decent. You shall write, Dick, and

I will sign. Bless you, mother always said you'd find out some day."

Dick got the notes with which the lawyers had furnished him for reference, and sat down meekly to write at her dictation. Walking up and down, she began her narrative.

In a clear voice, in a free and easily flowing style, which would have done honour to me, the novelist, she recounted the events of her life, from her marriage with Mr. Bowker to her marriage with Mr. Flint. No motives assigned, no psychological doublings, no excuses offered, nor attempt to extenuate. Plain matter-of-fact statement. At the death of the dear departed saint, Mr. Flint, she stopped.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Bowker," said Dick, "that we have not quite finished. There are still eight years."

"Two years I was at Market Basing, in service."

"That leaves six."

"I sha'n't tell you what I did in those six years."

"Perhaps you will let me write, and you can sign."

Dick took the notes, and rapidly wrote, in as few words as possible, the story of those six years. Then Polly took the manuscript from his hands, and read it all through without blushing.

"Before I sign it, I want to put in something for myself."

"You are not in a position to make conditions."

"Then I want to ask a question. What are you going to do with this?"

"For the present, I am going to lock it up in my own safe."

"And not going to show it to any one? Oh! then it's all right. Hand me the pen, Dick. You're not

the boy, my handsome Dick, to send an old friend to prison, because she loved you. There, Dick, you are free now. Shake hands with your old Polly."

Dick held out his hand. Polly threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him with a tear in her eye.

Then she went away. On the way to town, she formed a project. It was wild, perhaps, but bold: in the highest degree impudent and shameless; but it had the merit of possessing genius.

But first to Mrs. Kneebone's.

Paragon-place looked exactly as it had done when she had brought the baby ten years before, and left it to Mrs. Kneebone's fostering care. In the court, there were the children playing just as when she had been there last; the same squalor, the same dirt. At the entrance stood a figure she did not remember, with the shape of an old man, and the face of a boy, leaning on a crutch, looking up Gray's Inn-road. It was Thoozy, standing there on the chance of seeing little Bill pass by. For Thoozy's ideas of the outer world were limited. In spite of his occasional studies in the *Daily Telegraph*, he had never, by any experience of his own, arrived at a personal knowledge of any outer world except that of the heart of London. The world to him was a long succession of streets. Little Bill, taken from one Paragon-place, was in Thoozy's mind, transported to another: perhaps a finer and more wealthy street. On warm days he hobbled to the entrance of the court, and planted himself where, should his old friend by any lucky chance come by, he could not fail of seeing him.

Thoozy turned round to see where the lady in black silk—he knew the faces of the Church visitors:

she was not a deaconess or a Sister of Mercy—was going to. She went straight to Mrs. Kneebone's. The door of the hospitable mansion stood open, as was its wont, and the lady walked in. Thoozy gave one more look up and down the road. No little Bill. Then he turned back, limped down the court—rheumatics being had in this early autumn weather—and followed the visitor. She went into the nursery, where Mrs. Kneebone was employed among her tender charges. She shut the door. Thoozy limped in after her, and looked through the keyhole listening.

Mrs. Kneebone raised her head to see who was thus unceremoniously intruding on her privacy. In her first confusion, she dropped the baby which was on her knees. The child fell back upon its bed; and, as it instantly went sound asleep, was probably not much the worse for its fall. A special Providence looks after the lives of babies and young children, its interposition being nowhere so clearly marked as in baby farms and on board passenger ships.

"Lord bless my soul!" she exclaimed, rushing forward with effusion, and holding out her hands. "Why, it's Polly Tresler. Polly, my dear soul, and how are you, and what's got you all this time not to drop a line to your old—old friend?"

Thoozy, outside, laid down his crutch, and executed a short dance—more agile, perhaps, than might have been expected of one so decayed. Then he applied his eye to the keyhole again. The court was quiet, and the voices were shrill, so that he heard as well as saw.

"Now don't let's have none of your blarney, Mother Kneebone. So, drop it. Where's my boy?"

"Where's little Bill?" cried the old woman, in a tone of deepest surprise. "Where's little Bill? Why, where should he be? Didn't you send for him yourself, but Tuesday was a fortnight? And paid his bill and all?"

"I never sent for him."

"You never sent for him! Now, Polly, you always was one to crack a joke. A gentleman came himself to fetch the boy: and he was to pay for what there might be owing for him. You know, Polly, though I never would press you, I wrote you as there was five-and-thirty shillings due. So I told him, and he paid me honourable, and he gave me—what was it he gave me, now?—fifteen shillings besides. Two pound ten in all, because he said the boy looked so well-an'-arty. And you know well, Polly—you know the soft heart of your old Kneebone, as couldn't abear to see the boy suffer, so many's the shillin' he cost me out of my pocket to keep him decent. Ax Thoozy if he didn't. Well, and the gentleman——"

"A tall, big man, with a black beard?"

"Tall and big he was, surely. And a black beard? Yes. With a leg. Oh, Polly, my dear, a beautiful leg of hese own. Which if he's your fourth, Polly, and not to deceive you, my dear, for worlds, it's a happy woman you ought to be."

Polly sat down on the only chair of the room, and stared.

"But what did you tell him about me?"

"Tell him? Now, Polly, do you think I'd tell him anything. Do you thing I'd do it? Not for pounds, Polly. And how well and fine you're looking, to be sure. Most as young as you did ten years ago."

"He didn't ask no questions?"

"And he did, though. Asked if the boy was happy. Bill—oh, Polly, what a boy that is, and as like you as two peas, though a trifle thin in the face; 'cos, do what I would, he never did eat enough—he ups and he says that he won't leave his old mother. Reg'lar made me cry, he did, the dear. Then the gentleman—him with the leg—he says, 'Mrs. Kneebone, you're a good woman, and the Lord will reward you.'"

"That I swear he didn't," cried Polly, knowing that Dick was by no means likely to make any such pious remark.

"Well, then, he said somethink very much like it; and asked a lot more questions. Said he wondered why I kep' that idle, good-for-nothink vagabond, Thoozy, about the place. What a leg he have, to be sure!"

"Who's Thoozy?"

"A baby what I never got paid for. A boy growed up here who won't work. Ah, Polly, I've had a deal of trouble to keep little Bill from being let into bad ways by that Thoozy. But I've always had a soft heart, and I couldn't abide to send the poor boy adrift on the streets, and him on crutches and all. So you see I lets him stay on, bad as he is. And I do hope you won't find little Bill none the worse for his company."

"Oh!" whispered Thoozy. "I'll be even with you for this. Won't I!"

"Then you didn't tell him nothing at all?" said Polly, staggered.

"Not a syllable—not a word—not a thing, Polly, s'help me. And you haven't shook hands yet with your old friend as knowed you down at Poplar, when

you married Bowker, and knows all your little buzzom secrets. Can't you trust your Kneebone, my dear?"

Polly got up, and shook out her skirts.

"He finds out everything," she murmured. "He knows it all. He's dreadful masterful. He's a devil—he's a devil!"

"Who knows everything, Polly?—not Bowker?"

"No. Nobody you know, Mother Kneebone. Well, I shall go. Good-bye."

"Don't go just yet, Polly. Stand a trifle for your old——"

"Oh, drat the old friend! Well, will half a crown be any good; because I ain't too rich? Here you are, then. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, deary; and give me news of my little Bill. If he sends his love to his old mother, be sure and let me have it. Ah! he *was* a boy, that boy—he *was* a boy!"

"I suppose he was," said Polly, "if he wasn't a girl. Good-bye, then."

She lingered, woman-like, to look at the babies; and Thoozy noiselessly crept out, and resumed his old place at the entrance of the court.

Presently Polly came out again.

"How d'ye do, Polly Tresler?" cried a squeaking voice in the passage.

She gathered up her skirts, and looked round.

"How d'ye do, Polly Tresler? Don't you remember me? I'm Thoozy. Lord bless me, I know you as well as if it was only yesterday. I remember your bringing little Bill to Mother Kneebone's."

This was, unhappily for Methusalem's credit as a truth-teller, a deliberate lie. He remembered nothing

about it, though he did remember perfectly well having acted for a year or two as little Bill's dry nurse. For in early life the poor little wizenfaced cripple had developed a genius, almost matronly, in the management of babies; and, on the strength of it, had been retained on the establishment in the capacity of nurse, until, by mere force of character and his fortunate discovery, he succeeded in promoting himself to the position of chief resident physician and real master of the hospital.

"Oh, you're Thoozy, are you? And what do you mean by speaking to a lady?" said Polly, looking at him with astonishment.

"Because you are a lady, a real lady, and nothin' but a lady, silk stockin's and all. Oh, I knows a lady when I sees one. Sorry you didn't speak to me first, instead of Mother Kneebone, 'cos I suppose she has been a-gammoning of you."

Polly started.

"Look here, you boy—you little, withered-up imp—you miserable little rickety devil—if you tell me lies, I'll break every bone of your wretched little crooked body. Just you tell me right out all about it."

It will be seen that Polly was roused to wrath by Thoozy's suggestion of "gammon." Thoozy gave one look of rage and spite.

"I'll be even with both of 'em," he muttered. Then he smoothed out his face, and proceeded to reply.

A soft answer turneth away wrath.

"Don't be hard upon me, missus. I'll tell you all I know. Last Wednesday fortnight, a swell comes here when Bill and me was havin' our school in the

court. I used to teach Bill, whenever the old woman gave him enough to eat. You can't teach a boy when he's starvin' for food—now, can you? That day, Bill picked up a bloater, and we had it between us for breakfast. In the afternoon the swell comes in.

“‘Where's Mrs. Kneebone?’ he says, as grand as you please.

“‘She's in there,’ says I.

“‘Where's little Bill?’ says he.

“‘What little Bill?’ says I.

“‘Polly Tresler's little Bill,’ says he.

“‘Here he is,’ says I.

“‘Oh,’ says he.”

Polly's face became scarlet—a premonitory squall of a brewing storm.

Thoozy took breath, and went on.

“Then he goes in, and we goes in, after him. Offers Mother Kneebone five pounds for information. Kneebone, she pockets the dibs, and she begins.

“‘Flint's the father of the boy,’ says she. ‘Flint was Polly's third. Polly's second I don't know, 'cos I never see him, and she wouldn't never tell me about him. And her first husband was Mr. Bowker, and he's livin' now; and I know where to put my 'ands upon him this very moment, if you please, for another five pound. Polly, she ran away from him because she——’”

“O—h—h!” It was as the roar of a tigress, and Polly turned from the boy, and rushed back to the house. Thoozy saw her go in, and looked up and down Gray's Inn-road—not for Bill this time, but for a policeman.

He saw one providentially fifty yards down the

road, and hobbled to him as fast as his rheumatics would let him.

"Come up here," he cried, taking the man by the arm: "there'll be murder done if you don't come quick."

The policeman followed him.

They were not a bit too soon. Polly, with flaming eyes and scarlet cheeks, had the old woman by the throat on the floor. She was kneeling on her chest, beating her head upon the boards, mad with rage. In a few minutes more, the miserable old woman would have been done to death. The policeman dragged her off. He was a big, powerful man; but he had to use all his strength, and pinned her against the wall. Then he secured his prisoner by a dodge well known to London policemen: seized her wrist with his right hand, and twisted his left arm round it upon her shoulder. The prisoner may burst away if he likes, but will break his arm in the endeavour. Polly struggled furiously for a minute or two, and then gave in. She had still sense enough left to see that the battle had better be given over; and, for obvious reasons, she held her tongue.

Presently, the old woman began to revive. Thoozy fetched cold water, and threw it over her—a good lot at a time, because he knew how much she disliked that form of fluid. She sat up, and looked round.

"You've got to come up to Clerkenwell to-morrow. So mind that," said the policeman. "You boy, bring her along. And now, come away. If you'll promise to go quiet," he said, when they got into the open air, "I'll let your arm free."

"I'll go quiet," said Polly.

So, holding her gently by the wrist, the guardian of the peace led Polly away, and committed her to the custody of the law, followed by those of the population who had the shining hours idle on their hands, and were naturally anxious for amusement.

Polly had a bad and uncomfortable night. Mrs. Kneebone was left with a severe headache, and a shaking of the nerves so violent that it forced her to imbibe too much fortifying medicine, insomuch that she fell down among the babies, and slept there. Methoosalem administered the feeding bottles; took away the old woman's matches to prevent accidents with fire; and climbed to his own miserable bed, where he went to sleep, chuckling over the pious fraud by which, at one and the same time, he had paid off old and new scores. It may be remarked that his first thought had only been to reveal a portion of Mrs. Kneebone's *fourberies*, in order that shame, with perhaps a little personal chastisement, might fall upon her. But Polly's allusions to his own physical defects carried him a little beyond the limits of a pure practical joke, and very nearly ended fatally for both Polly and his old woman.

In one or two of the papers there appeared, two days after, under the head of police news, a short account, headed "A Row in a Baby Farm," which described how a woman, calling herself Mrs. Flint, a widow, of no occupation, was charged with violently assaulting an old woman named Kneebone, the keeper of a notorious baby farm. Evidence being heard, the worthy magistrate, without going into the antecedents of the prisoner, against whom the police had nothing to allege, remarked that it was clearly a very brutal

assault upon an aged and infirm woman. He cautioned the prisoner very seriously on her ungovernable temper; remarked that it was well for her that the principal witness was able to appear that morning to give evidence; and sentenced her to a penalty of £ 5 fine, or a month's imprisonment, with hard labour. The money was paid on the spot.

Thoozy led home his old woman, not sympathizing much with her shaky condition, which he attributed more to the strong drink than the fright she had had.

"How did she go for to find it out?" said Mrs. Kneebone. "You little devil, you told her."

"Never told her nothing. How should I know who she was? Perhaps she met the big swell in the road. I thought I saw him pass," said the mendacious one.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER Mr. Eddrup's confession, Frank met him almost daily. The old man used to go to his court every morning at ten, and sit in his office—a single room—which was like the gate of an Eastern city, inasmuch as he sat there and administered justice. Haroun Al Raschid could not have been more just, Saladin was not more merciful. Thither came the women with their quarrels: "Forgive, forgive," he said. Thither the men out of work brought their tales of disappointment and privation: to these he lent money, or pointed the way to work. Here he received his rents, which amounted to a goodly sum, and devised means for the improvement of his dwellings. The

court was a model. All the houses but two belonged to him. Gradually, by slow degrees, they had been pulled down and rebuilt in flats, with whatever improvements Mr. Eddrup and his builder could devise. The property paid him about two and a half per cent. Side by side with his stood the other two houses—squalid, mean, and decayed. They paid a good fifteen per cent. to the man—he was a leader at Exeter Hall, and knew nothing about his property except that it paid—to whom they belonged. Mr. Eddrup did what he could even here—persuaded the people to be clean, and made no difference between them and his own tenants.

One thing everybody knew: they might rob their landlord, refuse to pay his rent, maltreat him. All these, in the old times, they had done. He would never prosecute or use the law. He received his own by their good grace. Strange to say, he hardly ever lost by it. Old inhabitants of the court—especially one man, who had been the worst of the flock, and was shrewdly suspected of having personally robbed Mr. Eddrup, one dark night—protected his interests. Nobody was allowed to shoot the moon; public opinion was against it. Nobody told lies about back rents and the reasons for asking delay; public experience had proved it useless. Truth, when it does as much good, is much more pleasant to tell than a falsehood.

At one o'clock, Mr. Eddrup left his office, and generally went away home—that is, to Skimp's—where he sometimes sat in the dingy drawing-room, but oftener sat in his own single room, reading or writing, till dinner time. After dinner, he went back regularly to the court, when he lectured in the "chapel,"

as they called it, on some evenings, talking freely on all kinds of subjects connected with those branches of social science most useful and interesting to his flock; sometimes taught in a night school; sometimes paid visits among the people.

A scholar, a gentleman, wrecked in early life, he had the courage to make of his miserable fate a reason for a life of philanthropy and self-denial. What he might have been, had his power of resisting temptation always been as great, who can tell?

He talked freely at this time to Frank; told him of his hopes—they were all centred in that small row of houses where he spent most of his day; and of his fears—they were all for the future of his people when he should be gone.

"I might leave the property in trust; but in a few years the letter of the will would be executed, and the spirit neglected. A man can do no good after his death. Better let the money go, and trust that the work may go on. I have seen so much of charitable trusts, that I know the evil they produce; how they pauperize the people, and take away their self-respect. I will have none of them. If only, Mr. Melliship, some men like you would take up the work."

"I cannot," said Frank. "I am one of those who only approve of good things, and stand idly by."

"There is Silver, the acrobat. He speaks well. But he would make the place a hot-bed of religious enthusiasm. Nevertheless, he has a burning spirit, and will some time or other become a preacher. I will speak to him about leaving his profession."

"Make him take his daughter away too, then. Patty has no business with that kind of work at all."

"Poor girl," said Mr. Eddrup. "When her father asked my advice, I had none to give him. Then she came herself. She said she knew nothing which she could do. The family kettle is very small, but it was hard to keep it going. I let her have her own way. But she is good and modest. Don't tell me she is not, Mr. Melliship, because I love the child. I have seen her grow up."

"I think you love all the people about you."

"I do," he said, simply; "God knows I do. I have been drawn to them by the thousand ties that struggle and endeavour engender. They were ignorant; I had knowledge. They are poor; I have money—enough, at least, to help them. They desired good things; I could show them the way to some good things. Never think that the poor are ungrateful; never think that they are forgetful: never believe that they are in any respect, whether of good feeling, of delicacy, of forbearance, inferior to yourself. Manners are but conventionalism. In my court there are men and women with as good manners, as far as consideration for others and unselfish labour go, as you will see in women and men of the highest culture in England. They are not better than the rich, I suppose; but they are as good. And remember, they are tempted tenfold as much. Tempted! Good God! When I think of myself, my miserable fall—when I see these people resist, I am fain to go away and weep by myself for shame, and cry for deliverance from the body of this death."

He was silent for awhile. They were walking in the garden of Granville Square, which they had all to themselves.

"Love them? Of course I love them. I know all

their secrets. They bring me all their troubles. They tell me all their sins. They confess to me. St. Paul says it is good for men to confess to one another. He means not that priests have anything to do with it—the great-hearted preacher was too wise for that: but he knew that when the soul is burdened with sin and misgiving, the mere telling is a relief and a safeguard. We sin; we fall into temptation; we fall into evil; our minds are clouded. As prayer is a purification, so confession is an unburdening. In the darkness, evil visions rise and horrible forms dance before our eyes. We let in the light by confession—they vanish and die away. St. Paul knew what he was talking about. Mr. Melliship, my heart is full to-day. Come and hear me next Sunday evening. I have a thing to say to the people which must not longer be delayed.”

Frank knew very well what the thing would be. He went, with Patty and her father, prudently silent as to what was to happen.

It was a crowded night. Every bench was full—the women and the men hushed with an expectancy of something about to happen. Patty and Frank, with the boy, took their seats, as usual, on the last bench. They were used to Frank by this time, and only supposed that he “kept company” with Patty, who was known to be a good girl, of eccentric habits of dress, which she gratified, with her father’s sanction, at the music hall. In other words, her profession was no secret; and she was looked upon with considerable respect as a public character of unblemished reputation.

They had the usual hymn—one of those quiet old Wesleyan psalms, different from the jubilant strains of

modern Anglican hymns with which we nowadays proclaim a confidence and exultation we are very far from feeling. Not a triumphal song, not a meaningless rapture set to pretty music, not a vain and false celebration of an unreal New City; not a lying wish to behold beauties which would pall upon us in a week, just as much as the Crystal Palace; but a hymn in a minor key, attuned to the sadness that always fills the poor man's heart—one that they could sing with fervour, because it belonged so fully to themselves.

Then Mr. Eddrup rose, and, contrary to his usual practice, began to speak himself without asking if any had aught to say.

He commenced by reminding them that he had been among them for forty years. He told how his desire had been to communicate what little knowledge he had, and to do good, as best he might, with what little means he had. He reminded them of the duties of self-reliance and self-respect. He showed, for the thousandth time, how ignorance and sin are interwoven with all human suffering; how the former can be slowly removed, and the latter is generally a departure from the laws of nature. And then, with a great effort, he raised himself erect, threw back the long white hair off his face, and told them all his story.

Not with apologies; not with excuses; with no embellishments. The plain, black, ugly story: the story of violated trust and ruined honour; of disgrace, of prison. He hid nothing.

"Such I was," he said. "This is my history. I have always meant to tell it. I put it off half in cowardice, half because I thought I would wait until you learned to love me—till your hearts yearned

towards me, even as mine does now to you. I think I have never till now won your perfect confidence. Only of late has it been impressed upon me that some of you look up to me with reverence and affection. To me—to a convicted thief! Therefore I could wait no longer. My children—I have seen most of you grow up; you have been in our schools; I have taught you: you are in very truth my children—you must respect me no longer. I am not worthy. I am meaner than the meanest—lower than the lowest. I am a convicted thief.

“Years ago I dreamed of this night. I pictured to myself how I should feel, standing before you all, with shamed face, telling you all that I am nothing better than a convicted thief.

“Respect me no longer. I have never been able to respect myself. Tell your little ones that the old man with white hair was not fit to sit among them; point your fingers out at him as he goes down the street, call after him, hoot him. He has been an impostor, a hypocrite, a deceiver. He pretended to be—

“No, my children, no—I am no hypocrite. I am a coward; because I should have told you all this long years ago. No hypocrite. Believe me, in this my solemn confession, that I repent and have repented. I have set myself to hide from the world, and work in this little corner, the servant of you all. To repent. Before you all, and in the face of GOD, in whose presence I stand, I say that I repent, and am heartily sorry. Shall I say more? Nay, for I would not that you think I should excuse myself. Let me have your pity—your pity, since I can no longer have your love. And pray for me—pray for me.”

He sank upon his knees, his head in his hands, resting against the handrail; and, as he ceased, the women began to lament, and to cry aloud for sympathy and pity. Down the rugged cheeks of the men the great tears fell unchecked. Some of them sobbed and choked. All looked bewildered at the spectacle of the poor old man, their benefactor, their patron, their saint—more to them than even Wesley was to his people—kneeling before them all, silent, bowed, abased. Frank wept unrestrainedly. Here was no acting. It was the truth, sublime and gracious. It was the final self-sacrifice of a man whose whole days had been a long sacrifice. He had LIVED THE LIFE. Truest Christian, noblest warrior in the army of God—he had won the last battle he would have to fight on earth before he was called away—

“Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory shall he come
To Heaven, which is his home—”

to alter the words of the poet.

It was Mr. Silver who broke the silence.

“We have one thing to do,” he said. “We are here a little congregation, the people of the Lord, met to pray and praise. One of us has told the story of his life, and of a great sin. Let us then pray that we be not led into temptation. Who shall cast a stone? Will you?—will you?—shall I? God forbid! Our respect for him remains. Our love remains. Friends all, I adjure you, lock up this thing in your hearts. Women, don’t speak of it to each other: men, hide it away. Put the recollection of it out of your minds.

Friend and father of us all, God has forgiven—we have forgotten.”

From the voices of all there went up a mighty cry: “We have forgotten—we have forgotten.”

Silver tried to raise the old man. He had fainted. They brought water and sprinkled over him, as he revived. He sat, feeble and pale, while the women, in their tender way, busied about him. Then he signed to Patty to come to him.

“Go home for me,” he said, “and bring down all I want—I will never leave the court again.”

They took him to a vacant room in one of his own houses. They laid him in bed, and sent for a doctor. Nothing was wrong with him—only feebleness, only a sudden break-up. And from his little room, where he daily received his people, Mr. Eddrup was never to stir again. Frank went home with his friends, strangely agitated and moved. He had for once obtained a glimpse of the highest life—the courage which meets everything, which shrinks from no trial; the patience which endures to the end; the life before which all other lives appear so mean and paltry. Of the women in the room that night, all wept but one. Patty Silver sat with dry eyes. Her heart was full of questionings and doubts. She heard but half of what Mr. Eddrup said; for her eyes were bent furtively on Frank, and she was thinking if he loved her. “He loves me—loves me not.” Surely when the Deluge came, and the whirling flood swept down the shrieking street, Marguerite, in her chamber, sat deaf and careless, thinking only, “He loves me—loves me not.”

But that story which Mr. Eddrup told his friends lay buried in their hearts. They never spoke of it in

his lifetime. They never speak of it now he is dead and gone to that silent Land where his honour, like the soldier's sword, has been restored to him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRANK sitting in Mrs Skimp's drawing-room with Captain Bowker. It is in the morning, but the master mariner is smoking his long cherrystick pipe. Time hangs somewhat heavily upon his hands since he has had nothing to do. Sometimes he takes the boat and goes down to the docks, where he picks up old friends, and spins old yarns. Sometimes he pays visits to ancient haunts at Poplar. Sometimes, he makes a morning call upon his cousin, who lives close by, to please whom he has come to live at Skimp's. For the Captain has money—he got it in private ventures during his many voyages—besides the little pension which his late employers have given him. It is not much; but it is enough to make it desirable to retain him near the family, for fear of foreign and malign influences. More often than anything else, the Captain spends his mornings at the table in Mrs. Skimp's drawing-room, with a sheet of paper and an inkstand, making innumerable blots as he corrects and adds to his poems. This work, indeed, constitutes the real pleasure of his life. To read his verses aloud, in the presence of a man who will listen without laughing, such as Frank Melliship, is pure and unmixed happiness. To get them printed is a dream which he just permits to himself. Some day, he thinks—some yet

distant day—he will sacrifice the hundred pounds of capital needed to accomplish this object. He must pinch to make up for the loss of five pounds a year; but what is a little pinching in comparison with so great an object?

To-day he has been reading a remarkable poem, his *chef d'œuvre*, on which he means to base his reputation. It is called "The Captain's Dream." In this work, imitating, unconsciously, the example of Dante and several other distinguished "makers," he has embodied in a vision the whole sum of his philosophy. Frank has been pretending to listen. The good-nature which prevents him from yawning in the honest Captain's face, also obliges him to come from time to time, and pay Mr. Bowker a visit, in order to give him pleasure. I, who yield to no man in the quality of good-nature, have ruthlessly cut out the whole of the Captain's poem, which is among the records from which this history is compiled, solely because it might bore my readers. I am far from saying the work is not remarkable in many ways: there is a flavour of the briny in it, a smell of pickled pork, occasional whiffs of rum, a taste of the pannikin, the breath of the ocean. Nautical metaphors alone are used—seafaring similes.

We are on board ship, and the wind is whistling through the shrouds. But—but—truth compels me to add that the poet's diction is commonplace, and his thoughts are not always exalted. Why do we not consider the varieties of the human mind in our estimate of poetry? There are gradations of intellect, like terraces. Instead of measuring a newly-fledged poet with a stupid, Procrustean bed of criticism, reducing all to

one standard, why not make an effort to classify intellectual produce, as merchants classify colonial produce? I believe there are, in the single article of sugar alone, about twelve gradations from treacle to crystal. Suppose we made twelve grades or degrees in poetry? Our greatest poets would belong to the twelfth—the supreme degree which embraces all the rest. As every poet must have some brains, if only a thimbleful, it follows that he must have a very large mass of mankind beneath him. Martin F. Tupper, for instance, might be numbered one, or perhaps two, on account of some gleams of scholarship. Captain Bowker would belong to the first grade, without any possibility of promotion at all.

“So, Mr. Melliship, there’s all my ideas for you. When I get more, I stick them in. As I go on living, the poem will go on growing—consequently improving.”

“Do not your ideas change sometimes?”

“Never. When I get an idea, Mr. Melliship, it isn’t a flash in the pan, like some people’s. My ideas take me first of all unawares. They generally begin, like a toothache, when I least expect them. Perhaps when I feel a little buffy, in the morning; mayhap, after an extra go of grog the night before. Then one comes all of a sudden. I turn it over, and think it out. I’m rayther a slow thinker; but I’m an uncommon sure one, and I never let it go. I don’t read much, except the newspaper; so that I’ve got a great advantage over most poets, all my ideas are my own. I don’t steal them and alter them. I let ’em grow. It takes me a long time—perhaps months—to work an idea into shape, but when I have got him, there he is,

put into the poem neat and ship-shape, preserved for cure, like a bit of salt beef in a cask of brine. Woman, now—you remember the beautiful passage I read to you just now about woman?”

“Yes—yes—yes. Oh! don’t take the trouble to read it again, Captain Bowker,” cried Frank, hastily.

“A few lines to show my meaning,” said the Captain, clearing his throat. “Here we are. Now listen:—

“ ‘Woman is like a ship—new painted, gay,
Fresh holystoned and scraped, she sails away,
Manned by her captain. While the weather holds
The ship sails trim, the woman never scolds,
The dancing waves play on the starboard bow,
Her sails fill out, her pennants gaily flow;
The captain takes his thankful grog below.’

That’s a good line, young man. That last is a very good line.”

He read it over again, shaking his head slowly from side to side in admiration.

“ ‘Look where ahead the black clouds rise, and see
How changed the lines of ocean; on the lee
The rocks rise threatening. Furl the mainsail, stow
All snug: here comes the tempest. Let her go.’

“I leave out the next fifty lines, where I follow up the comparison of a good woman to a good ship. She weathers the storm. Then I go on to talk of a bad woman; and I end thus:—

“ ‘All lost—the ship obeys the helm no more.
She strikes—she sinks. Her voyages are o’er.’ ”

“Very fine,” said Frank—“very fine indeed.”

“Yes; I flatter myself that there is good stuff there. They’ve compared woman to all sorts of things. Look here. Here’s a bit I cut out of an old play:—

“ ‘A woman is like to—but stay—
What a woman is like, who can say?
She’s like a rich dish
Of ven’son, or fish,
That cries from the table, “Come, eat me!”
But she’ll plague you, and vex you,
Distract and perplex you,
False-hearted, and ranging,
Unsettled, and changing,
What, then, do you think she is like?
Like a sand? like a rock?
Like a wheel? like a clock?

“Now, you know, it’s all very fine. That’s not my notion of a simile. Don’t hurry about from one to another to show your cleverness. Stick to one. Woman is like a ship, isn’t she? Very well—there you are. Work it up, as I do. There’s her hold, must be laden or in ballast; a woman without ballast is like a cork on the water. Her head is the captain’s cabin—only room for one. The captain is the man at the helm. As for the rigging, some of it’s ornamental, some of it’s useful. You’ve got the bunting, and you’ve got the sails. The sails is her petticoats, without which, d’ye see, she can’t sail out of port; the bunting is her ribbons, because they all, ships as well as women, sail better if they’re proud of themselves. And as for her masts, her boats, her keel, her bowsprit, and her foksle, and all the rest of it—why, bless you, if I had time, I’d run through the whole and show you how the simile holds. Ah! it’s a very delicate subject. Marriage, now. People will get married. Why? The Lord knows. I did myself once, and a pretty market I brought my pigs to. Ease and comfort? Quiet and tranquillity for composing? Not a bit of it. Morning, noon, and night went her tongue. It was, ‘Jem, get

this;' 'Jem, go there.' And if I didn't, squalls, I can tell you."

"Well, but you were the man at the helm," said Frank, with a smile.

"Man at the helm! I might as well have been in the bows; she stayed below all watches. She wouldn't answer the helm nohow. Never took no notice of the helm. Kept her own course. Never was such a craft. Neat to look at, too. Painted rosy red in the bows; full in the lines, but clean cut, down about the stern; always neat and tidy in the gear. But come to command her—phew!—then you found out what a deceptive, headstrong, cranky, difficult vessel she was. Ah, well; it's fifteen years ago since I saw her."

"Is she dead, then?"

"Hush!" said Captain Bowker; "don't speak so loud. If she ain't dead, where is she? She left me; went cruising on her own account; took in another skipper, may be. Anyhow, she went. We've gone away from each other. Dead? Well, she's as good as dead. Don't you ever marry, Mr. Melliship. You're a young man, and the temptation will come strong over a young man at times. Fight it. St. Paul says himself it's better not to marry. I heard that in church last Sunday morning. Say to yourself, 'Which shall it be? Shall it be peace and repose; or shall it be nagging, and pecking, and boxing of ears? Shall it be your legs on the fender and your pipe in your mouth; or shall it be the legs of the chair about your head, and the pipe smashed? Shall it be fair weather, or shall it be foul?' There's more craft built for show than for use in these bad times. Don't trust any. Stick to yourself, and be happy. As for me, Mr. Mel-

lanship, I'm a fixture. Nothing can disturb me now. I'm in port. I defy the storms. To quote myself, I sing—

“ ‘Laid up in dock, serene I shake my fist,
And fortune's storms may thunder as they list.’ ”

Those are very fine lines, Mr. Melliship,—very forcible, strong lines indeed—

“ ‘Laid up in dock, serene I shake my fist,
And fortune's storms—’ ”

“Please, Cap'n Bowker,”—it was the red-armed Mary Ann who interrupted him,—“there's a lady wants to see you.”

“I suppose it's my cousin,” growled the captain. “Why can't she wait for me to go and see her? It's my turn, too.”

“No 'taint Mrs. Robins,” said Jane, who knew the Captain's belongings; “this lady says she's your wife!”—grinning all over.

The captain's arms dropped, and his face turned an ashy white. Frank laughed at first; but the poor man's distress was so great that this sense of the ludicrous was lost in pity.

“Found me out, has she?” he murmured. “After fifteen years—‘Laid up in dock, serene’—No; that won't do. Mr. Melliship, wait a moment. Don't go and leave me in this pinch. Can't nothing be done? See her. After fifteen years, to go back to prison! It's more than I looked for. Tell me what to do. Help me to ride out the gale.”

“There is nothing to be done,” said Frank. “But perhaps you had better see her. Suppose she is not your wife, after all?”

"Stay with me. Stand by an old shipmate. Don't desert me, Mr. Melliship."

"But I can't interfere between you and your wife. Be brave, man. You ought not to be afraid of a woman."

"As an ordinary rule," said Captain Bowker, clearing his throat, "there ain't a braver man going than me. Not another woman in the world I'm afraid of. But this one's an exception. You didn't know my Polly. I don't care for the rest of 'em, if they were all to come on together. But Polly's too much for any man."

There was a rustling of a dress on the stairs, and Frank waited for a moment.

A tall figure in black silk, with a thick veil, glided in. As Frank glanced at her, somehow he thought of Market Basing and Parkside.

"Don't sheer off," murmured the captain, in an ecstasy of terror.

But Frank stole softly out of the room, and closed the door, bringing the red-armed one down with him. She had followed Mrs. Bowker up the stairs, with intent to listen at the keyhole. Mrs. Skimp and her daughter were at the bottom, with the same laudable object.

"Now, Mrs. Skimp," said Frank; "no listening."

And he sat down on the bottom steps by way of precaution.

"O Jem!" cried Polly, falling on the Captain's unresisting neck, and kissing his grizzled forehead—"O Jem! to think I should find you, and after so many years, and your dreadful cruel conduct. Oh, this is a blessed day!"

"How did you find me, Polly?" asked her husband.

"Went to Leggatt & Browne's—your old firm. The clerks told me. This is a blessed day!"

"D—— the clerks," said the captain. "And why didn't you go before, if you wanted to find me?"

"Because I thought you were dead, Jem. I've wore black ever since in mourning for you. See here. They told me at Poplar that you was alive, and where to ask for you. Oh, what a joyful thing to find your husband after fifteen years!"

She pulled out her handkerchief, and began to weep; but not plentifully.

"Well, what's to be done now?" asked the captain.

"That's a pretty thing to say to your wife," she answered. "Done! What should be done? I've come to live with you."

"Oh!" groaned the captain.

"I'm not going to live in a boarding-house. How much money have you got?"

He named his modest income.

"That will do. We shall have lodgings. What's the name of the house?"

"Skimp."

She went to the head of the staircase, and called out—

"Mrs. Skimp! You Mrs. Skimp! Come up here at once."

Frank quietly went away.

"We're going to leave this to-day," said Polly. "A week's notice. Bring the bill in ten minutes. I'll pay it. And none of your extras for me."

"You don't stay in my house another hour," said

the aggrieved Mrs. Skimp. "Cap'n Bowker, I'm ashamed of you. I pity you, I do. Paying attentions to my daughter, too."

"Eh!" said Polly. "What's that?"

"I never did," said the Captain, outraged and insulted. "They're all upon me, together. I never did. I'm—I'm—I'm DAMNED if I did! Mrs. Skimp, what do you mean by saying such things? And you a married woman yourself, and know the misery of being married. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I never looked at your daughter, even. I never look at any woman."

"You won't pay her any more attentions, for you shall come out of this place in quick sticks," said Mrs. Bowker. "How long will it take you to pack your things up?"

"Well," said the unresisting seaman, fairly over-stunned by the logic of facts, "I think to do it comfortable, you know, it might take a couple of hours."

"Very well," said the lady. "You pack everything up—mind you don't leave nothing behind you in a place like this—and I'll just go down to Poplar and let 'em know as I've found you, and I'll be back here before the two hours are up. This is a blessed day!"

She gave the Captain one chaste salute, shot a look of anger at Mrs. Skimp, and marched out of the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE fine morning at this time, Dick Mortiboy said to his ward, when they were out for a ride together—

“Bill, I do you the justice to believe that you don’t care very much about your mother.”

The boy shook his head.

“And you would not want to go away with her—to live with her, I mean?”

Little Bill’s cheeks changed colour, and he turned his blue eyes appealingly at Uncle Dick.

“Very well, my boy, then never say anything about her.”

The boy was mounted on an old pony that had been used occasionally to carry old Ready-money. It was very quiet and easy in its paces, and Dick had given his protégé a few lessons in horsemanship before they had ventured so far into the country together.

Of course, in a gossiping, tittle-tattling little place like Market Basing, there was an abundance of rumours rife concerning the parentage and history of little Bill. Widely as some of these reports differed from others in many particulars, they were all agreed as to one essential: it was that he was young Ready-money’s son. I have never heard that anybody connected the boy with Polly.

Now, I do not say that Dick Mortiboy’s argument concerning his ward was sound or just; but it was charitable. He argued thus:—“A few months ago I was told this was my son. I had not seen him. I did not love him. I was a poor man, and I contributed

what I thought sufficient for his support. The boy had the reputation of being my son. Now I have seen him, and know that he isn't mine. I like him, and I'll take care that he gets some of the benefits he would have got if his mother's tale had been true."

It was rather from impulse than from reason that Dick Mortiboy had acted. He was big, and rough, and generous. He had taken the boy from Mrs. Knee-bone's tender care, and brought him home with him. He had hardly thought of what he should do with him. He meant, after a time, to send him to school; for the boy was bright and sharp as a needle, and, till he talked, was quite a little gentleman in his new clothes.

As he looked down at the child's thin face and deep blue eyes, his heart grew soft. It seemed as if he had missed something all his life, which he was finding now. What he had missed were the influences of love: now they were upon him. He loved a woman. True, she did not love him; but she cared in a way for him. It was something to know that Grace loved him "as a brother"—as girls are fond of saying when they mean that they feel friendly interest in a man, but would rather not have him making love to them.

Then came the boy. His love for Dick was wonderful. His loyalty and obedience to what Dick told him, the pains he took to do everything that Dick said was right, his confidence and trust—all this touched Dick, and moved him: it was the first step upwards—to something like repentance. Only as yet, the faintest glimmer, like the first grey streaks of light in the east.

So Dick Mortiboy rode along gently on the strip of grass by the side of the turnpike road, thinking of

many things, when he became aware that his ward was calling out lustily—

“Mikey O’Grady! Mikey O’Grady!”

The boy was in the middle of the road, some twenty yards behind. He had reined in his pony, and was addressing by name a ragged, shoeless, dust-covered tramp. Dick stopped his horse.

“Mikey O’Grady,” the boy called out again.

“Shure enough it’s me name, your honour,” said the man, hat in hand.

“Don’t you remember me, Mike?”

The boy took off his cap, and shook his light hair over his eyes.

The Irishman gave a yell of delight.

“It’s little Bill,” he cried.

Dick listened to this colloquy, and said nothing.

“You’re going to London, Mike, ain’t you? Go to the old place, and find out Thoozy. You remember Thoozy, don’t you? Well, then, give Thoozy my love—tell him I am very well, and very happy, and—and I wish he was.”

Poor little Bill’s eyes began to fill with tears.

“Give him the message, my man,” said Dick. “Tell him, too, that when I come to town I shall go and see him. Perhaps I shall have something for him. And here’s something to help you on your way.”

The Irishman promised, and went on his way. Dick said nothing till bed-time came, when he patted his ward on the head, and said—

“Good boy, good boy. Another commandment, Bill. Never forget old friends. What is the whole duty of a boy?”

“Never steal—never tell lies—never swear—hold

his jaw—do his work—go away from England—always be ready to fight—look out for shams—never be satisfied—never forget old friends. Ten of em' now, Uncle Dick."

"That's a curious coincidence," said Uncle Dick.

On the morning after his refusal by Grace Heathcote, Dick Mortiboy went down to the bank full of his new purpose. It was to make George Ghrimes and Frank Melliship his junior partners in the concern. The foundry and the brewery would still be managed by Ghrimes for Dick's sole benefit; but he had made up his mind to rehabilitate Frank's fortunes, and reward the honest and able services of Ghrimes, by doing what he thought was to both a simple act of justice.

Young Ready-money was not an adept in the art of speechifying, and did not know exactly how to begin. He set forth his intention to Ghrimes in a sort of preamble about Frank.

"Ghrimes," he said, "I've been thinking things over a goodish deal of late, and I've got a proposal I want you to consider. When I was a boy—before I went away from the governor—if I had a friend to say a word for me and give me a hand, besides John Heathcote, it was my uncle Melliship."

"He was a very good sort, poor man," said Ghrimes, guessing half of what was about to come from his employer.

"He was," Dick assented. "Well, Ghrimes," he went on, "they've got a sort of rough notion in those rough parts I lived in a good many years, that one good turn deserves another. The very roughest there

act up to it. It is not a bad maxim, Ghrimes, anywhere. It seems to me that it is not affected by climate. My uncle Melliship did me many good turns. Now I am going to do his son one good turn: for I'm bound to help Frank. That's all clear, isn't it?"

Mr. Ghrimes nodded.

"Good. I knew you'd agree to all that. I've a word or two more to say before I've done. There's the man who greases the wheels—and there's a good many of 'em to grease—of my affairs, who keeps everything straight and square, and adds to the pile I've got already."

Mr. Ghrimes turned rather red.

"That's you, Ghrimes. You see it. Well, I think I'm bound to do something for you."

The manager of Dick Mortiboy's business looked at the pattern of the carpet, and said nothing. He had not had time to find words yet.

"What can we do best for all of us? The old bank was Melliship, Mortiboy, & Co. Why not revive the old title by taking Frank and you into partnership?—Mortiboy, Melliship & Ghrimes."

"Never alter the name of a bank," said Ghrimes. "The most unlucky thing that can be done. Remember Snow's bank, in the Strand."

"Well, we'll have it Melliship, Mortiboy & Co. I don't quite know how these things are done; but I suppose there will be something to sign written in a big hand."

"A deed of partnership would have to be prepared, of course."

"Very well. You will do all that. Arrange it with Battiscombe."

Dick put on his hat.

"Stay, Mr. Mortiboy—this won't do."

"We're partners now, Ghrimes. Call me Dick."

"Well, then, Mr. Dick. I don't know how to thank you for myself. As for Frank, it is an act which I call noble. I say it is noble, Mr. Mortiboy—I mean, Mr. Dick."

"You wouldn't if you knew everything, perhaps," said Dick. "However, what is the hitch?"

"Why, this: we must arrange terms of partnership, proportions—all sorts of things."

"I will see Battiscombe, then, at once. We will have a deed drawn up on terms which shall be advantageous to yourselves, and consistent with my desire to do a mere act of justice. Ghrimes, my father was the real cause of Melliship's failure and suicide."

"To some extent, I am afraid he was," said Ghrimes. "If your father had been a different sort of man, poor Mr. Melliship would have had no scruples about asking a little accommodation from him: especially as he knew how easily he could give it. But your father always seemed to me to be trying to get him into his power. Not to break him, and ruin him; but to keep him in his power. Your father always loved to have people under his thumb."

"Just so, and my uncle Melliship's death was a protest against my father's way of dealing. We are doing simply an act of reparation. Go-to-meeting folks sometimes do acts of reparation, besides repenting of their sins, I hope, Ghrimes? That's their affair, not mine, however. I'm going to write to Frank and make him this offer. He'll accept it; and as soon as he

comes down here we can all three sign Battiscombe's parchment, and enter into our partnership."

He went away. Bethinking him, however, that the letter should be written at once, he turned into his father's house in Derngate to do it.

He was very careful about this letter. He began by reminding Frank of their relationship; of the many kindnesses he had himself received from Frank's father; of the friendly and affectionate terms with which Mr. Melliship had received him on his return. And then he went on to enlarge upon the unhappy connection between his own father and the failure of Melliship, Mortiboy & Co. After this he proceeded to state his proposition.

"And now, Frank, having said so much, I have something to propose. I was yesterday talking about you to Grace Heathcote, and I have her authority for saying that she entirely approves of the proposition. What she approves of ought to be law to you. It is that you enter my bank as a partner, on equal terms with Ghrimes; that the name of Melliship be added to Mortiboy & Co.; that you come down here at once, and begin as soon as the deeds are drawn out. I hope you will see no obstacle to your accepting this proposition. Remember it comes from your first cousin, the man who owes a hundred debts of gratitude to your father; that Grace wishes it; that it will enable you to marry; in time, to pay off those debts with which your father's estate is encumbered; that it will do what is most desirable for your mother and Kate—bring them back to Market Basing; and bring you back, if this is anything, to all your old friends. Ghrimes is most eager that you will see your way to

accept my proposal. He is as anxious as any one to see you back again, and in your right position."

He folded his letter, put it into an envelope, and took it to Lucy Heathcote, asking her to forward it to Kate Melliship, who in turn would send it to Frank.

Lucy was with his father—she was old Ready-money's constant nurse and attendant—and was walking by the side of the poor old paralytic, while Hester pushed his Bath chair along the gravel terrace at the back of his house.

The aspect was sunny, and every fine day the old man was twice wheeled out to take the air. His state of late had been a good deal improved, and Lucy was full of hope. At first he had been unable to move at all, and, besides, had been generally almost unconscious. Then as he got a little better, he had recovered the partial use of one arm, and his wits had brightened very much. He was so far recovered now that he knew everything that was said to him quite well—expressed acquiescence with a slight nod of his old head, and conveyed intelligence of refusal or dislike to anything by wrinkling his forehead into a frown.

When Dick came near him he puckered his face in a dozen ugly ways.

Probably, he only half recollected what had taken place on the night he had the stroke; but it was clear to his son there was some memory left of that night's doings. Young Ready-money did not trouble his father with much of his company. Lucy had got a porcelain tablet, and wrote with a blue pencil on it. This she held before the old man, and kept writing a fresh question, till she found out what he wanted. This process was

often a very tedious one; but, with practice, Lucy Heathcote became very expert in understanding what was passing in her uncle's mind. His appetite was good; but as his faculty for tasting his food was gone, he had no disposition to quarrel with his cook. They gave him a little weak brandy and water to drink; and he spent his time between his bed, his sofa, and his Bath chair, happily enough. When Dick handed Lucy the letter for Frank, the old man frowned hard, as was his wont. The young man instructed his cousin as to the destination of the letter, asked after his father, and then strode away across the lawn, down the garden, and over the river towards his own little villa.

"Why does Uncle Richard always frown so desperately at Cousin Dick, whenever he comes here?" Lucy Heathcote asked herself.

She was frightened at Dick, and never had loved him much. She already had suspected there was something wrong—what she could not tell.

Nor did she set to work with slate and pencil to worm the secret out. But her uncle's conduct, when his idolized son approached him, left a disagreeable impression upon her mind she tried in vain to shake off.

Dick followed the river, passing the scene of his exploit with Polly, and the old cross where he had made known his love to Grace Heathcote. This was a sacred spot, and he sat musing under the shadow of the decaying stone for a good half-hour.

The river wound round the base of the hill on the

top of which the cross stood, and presently struck across Hunslope Park.

Following the tow-path, Dick had not walked far before he saw the earl himself coming towards him. He shook hands with him very cordially.

"We are well met, Mr. Mortiboy. How do you do? I was thinking of calling upon you to-morrow at the bank. I want you to——"

"If it is about money matters, my lord, pray see Mr. Ghrimes. I may mention that he is, or will be in a few days, my junior partner in the bank."

"Indeed!" said his lordship, with surprise. "I was not aware that Mr. Ghrimes had any fortune, Mr. Mortiboy. I have known him for many years, of course. Very happy to hear it. Very obliging gentleman-like man."

"Glad to hear your lordship say so," said Dick. "All our customers like George Ghrimes, I think. But you were right about his having no fortune, my lord. The only capital that Mr. Ghrimes will put into my concern is incorruptible honesty, untiring zeal, and high capacity for business—unless I add to the credit account, my lord, my gratitude for fifteen years' faithful service in the firm of Mortiboy & Co."

It was rather a high-flown speech for Dick to make, and he felt it; but there is something very invigorating in talking to a lord, until you get quite used to them. And young Ready-money had only lately left a Republic behind him.

His lordship's business with Dick was to tell him he wished to overdraw his account to a greater extent than it usually was.

"I shall have to write a great many cheques, Mr.

Mortiboy: and my steward will not pay in the bulk of the rents he has to receive for at least two months."

Dick replied—

"Of course, we shall do everything we can to fall in with your views."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Mortiboy. Pray, is that your son I have seen you riding with? I thought you were unmarried."

"So I am. That is my ward."

"We must marry you, Mr. Mortiboy—marry you, and put you into the House. You ought to sit for Market Basing."

"That's not my line, Lord Hunslope. I shall neither marry nor go into Parliament."

"Property has duties, Mr. Mortiboy. You have, if I am correctly informed, a very—very large stake in the country. In the interests of landed proprietors, we want men like yourself in the Lower House. Dangerous times like these demand the co-operation of all who have a stake in the country."

"No," said Dick. "I am only waiting here for a while, and I shall go away again, with the boy—to the West, probably, somewhere or other. As for the property, in course of time it will go to my cousins, the Heathcotes, just as if I had never come home at all."

Lord Hunslope stared curiously at the strange man who thought so little of a great property.

"You are a young man, Mr. Mortiboy. You will change your mind, and marry."

"I am not one of those who change their minds, Lord Hunslope. I shall never marry. A large part of my property, which my father made over to me,

will go, I repeat, to my cousins. When they marry, they will have, as I intend to arrange before I go away, some portion of it as their marriage dowries. My cousins are very good girls, Lord Hunslope; and, so far as I can judge of young ladies, fit to take higher positions than that which farmers' daughters generally aim at. Not that I care much about position. You see, I am more of an American than an Englishman. In the States we don't ask many questions about a man's family."

"They are very—hum—very excellent young ladies. You know, Mr. Mortiboy, that Mr. Heathcote is a man for whom I have the highest respect."

"As your lordship is not a fool," said Dick, bluntly, "that goes without saying, as the French put it. You may add, if you like, that the Heathcotes are a very old family—had all this estate long before your ancestors got it."

"That, also, I know. The Heathcotes are a representative race," said Lord Hunslope, a little taken a back by Dick's plain speaking. "Call at the Towers sometimes, Mr. Mortiboy. The countess will be very glad to see you. Come now, and take luncheon with us."

Dick made an excuse, and turned his steps homeward. The earl looked at him, striding along, great and strong, with eyes of envy. He was young and rich. The peer was old and poor.

"He's only a great boy, after all," thought the earl. "He knows nothing about our English life—and cares nothing about it."

Then he bethought him about the Heathcote girls, and their prospects, and went home.

"Have you remarked," he asked the countess, "those two Heathcote girls?"

"Grace and Lucy Heathcote? Oh, yes. I know them very well. What about them? Their manners are quiet and simple, much above their station—very much above the manners of that very vulgar person, their mother."

"I think so myself. Those girls, Alethea, will have a fortune of half a million sterling. That is, that large property will be divided between them."

The countess looked up in amazement.

"Half a million? You must be joking."

"Not joking at all. I was never more in earnest. Young Mr. Mortiboy, whom you saw at the children's sports the other day, told me himself, this morning, that he should not marry. He intends to go back to America, with a boy he carries about, and settle there. The two girls will have his money."

"My dear, he is not five-and-thirty. He may live for ever. Above all, he is sure to marry."

"He may live a long time, but he will keep his word. I have heard that young Ready-money, as they call him, always keeps his word in the smallest particular—for the matter of that, his father always did the same. He told me this with the most perfect seriousness. Now, think."

The countess smiled.

"Mrs. Heathcote is a horribly vulgar woman."

"The father is not vulgar. John Heathcote is rough, but he is a gentleman in his way. There is no man I respect more than John Heathcote. A good old family, too. They had Hunslope long before we were heard of."

"Cadwallader founded my family," said her ladyship sweetly, who had only intermarried with the earls of Hunslope. "Certainly, with all that money, the girls would have a right to marry above their station, as things go."

"Ronald is so shy," said Lord Hunslope.

Yet this conversation was the beginning of Grace Heathcote's having a third wooer at her feet.

CHAPTER XX.

ONE more incident in the quiet life of Grace Heathcote. An event which was not calculated to add anything to the sum total of her happiness, grateful as conquest is to beauty.

The particularly fine evenings of that early autumn, coupled with the recollection that croquet is a game not to be played with comfort after the middle of October, did not tend to cause any diminution in the frequency of Lord Launton's visits to Parkside.

He always had some good excuse for coming, and he did not want much pressing to take a mallet and join the little party on the lawn when he was there; but out of mere shyness, he seemed on every occasion to pay more court to Lucy than to Grace.

It happened that, a very few days after Lord Hunslope's conversation with Dick Mortiboy, Mrs. Heathcote had Lawyer Battiscombe, his wife, and daughters, from Market Basing, spending the afternoon with her.

Mrs. Heathcote—who was very fond of showing her town friends the beauties and conveniences of

country life, heartily loving to hear them praise everything that appertained to Parkside, and secretly rejoicing over their envy—had strolled with her friend as far as the little cottage where the poultry-woman lived, and where her turkeys and chickens were kept. The two ladies, with the skirts of their silks well bunched up in front of them, had hardly struggled through the ramshackle wicket into the poultry-yard, when Mrs. Battiscombe exclaimed,—

“Look, dear—there’s a young gentleman coming to us. Why, isn’t it Lord Launton?” she added, letting down the train of her dress, quite in a flutter.

Her friend was delighted. If there was one thing necessary to complete her triumph over the pretensions of the Battiscombe girls, it was to show off Lord Launton to their mother. She had been secretly hoping, ever since tea, that he would come. But she said, calmly enough,—

“Oh, yes, it’s only Lord Launton. I dare say he wants to see me or John about something.”

He came up, raised his hat to the ladies most politely, and began to stammer out his business to Mrs. Heathcote.

“I am a sort of deputation, Mrs. Heathcote.”

“Yes, your lordship,” said the lady, smiling very graciously.

“The boy’s cricket ground in the park is spoilt now—we have so many things in one part, and in the other the ground is not level; and I am come to ask Mr. Heathcote to be good enough to let them play in his home field till the end of the season. It won’t be long before it is over now.”

The young man took a great deal of trouble to promote athletics among the Hunslope boys.

"I dare say he will, if they don't do any mischief," said Mrs. Heathcote; "but boys are so mischievous."

"You see, the field is close to the school; and they must have a cricket-ground close at hand, if we can get them one. May I go and look if the ground will do, if Mr. Heathcote says we may have it? I think the field is very level."

The home close was on the other side of the hedge.

"It is so close to my poultry-yard," said Mrs. Heathcote; "they all run in the field. I'm afraid the boys will pelt the guinea fowl and hens. We have often had one killed, haven't we, Mrs. Thompson?"

With the honest bluntness of speech, and stark insensibility to the claims of the peerage to complaisant treatment, which is characteristic of our peasantry when they happen to be somebody else's tenants, Mrs. Thompson replied,—

"That we have indeed, ma'am. There was the white speckly hen only last week; and a parcel of young tearbacons a-rommackin' all over the field, no poultry won't do no good—to say nothing of getting fat."

"I'll be answerable for the good conduct of the 'tearbacons,'" said Lord Launton.

"It is a good deal nearer my hencoops than I like, your lordship; but I've no doubt Mr. Heathcote will give the boys leave."

She meant to prevent him from doing it, though, all the same.

There was a pause in the conversation, broken at

last by Lord Launton; who, feeling it a duty to say something, remarked, a little nervously,—

“What very fine turkeys you have, Mrs. Heathcote.”

The woman who kept the poultry showed the visitors her collection of birds.

“Take that water away from the coop with the ducks in,” said her mistress.

And then, turning to Lord Launton, she said,—

“They are two couples we’re fattening, and I don’t like to let ’em swill the barley-meal out as fast as they put it in.”

The young man smiled.

“But, poor things, are they not thirsty this warm weather?”

“I don’t know,” replied the business-like lady—
“they’ve got to get fat.”

Lord Launton moralized to himself on the miseries of the poultry-yard, until they were joined by Mr. Heathcote, who had come across his fields.

He gave his promise about the cricket-ground, much to his wife’s chagrin. They strolled back to the house together, and joined the little party on the croquet lawn.

Sides were chosen afresh. John Heathcote, Grace, and Lord Launton played Lawyer Battiscombe, his two daughters, and Lucy.

Mrs. Battiscombe was charmed; but so was Mrs. Heathcote. The two dowagers sat under a great elm, on the rising ground at the top of the garden, where they had a view of the road and the village.

“Really, he’s very affable,” remarked Mrs. Battiscombe.

"He often comes over and plays at croquet. We like him very well."

"I hope he won't run away with one of the girls' hearts, my dear," said the lawyer's lady—as it were calling "check" to Lydia's king. She put her ring-bedizened hand affectionately on Mrs. Heathcote's arm.

"I never think of such things, Mary." They had been schoolfellows at Miss Prim's, and kept up the farce of Christian names, though neither had loved the other for ages. "He often comes to see us, and John likes him—that's all."

"Of course, we could never expect that he would be allowed—" Mrs. Battiscombe began; but her remark was stopped by hearing the sound of wheels. "A carriage and pair! Why, it is Lord Hunslope and the countess," she cried, craning out her neck among the boughs.

Now it was Lydia's turn to call "check."

"Lords are as common as blackberries about Hunslope, my dear. I'm sure we never take any more notice of them than of other folks."

But she stood up, with her best cap just over the laurel hedge, and when the countess bowed, and Lord Hunslope raised his hat, she gave a complacent, vulgar little nod.

Their son saw the carriage, and turned rather red; but when it stopped at John Heathcote's gate, and then came on slowly up the gravel drive, he became quite the colour of the poppies.

The earl got out, and shook hands with the Heathcotes, and bowed to the Battiscombes.

Lydia Heathcote took the visit as a matter of course. She left Mrs. Battiscombe under the tree, and

strolled up to the carriage. She had never shaken hands with Lady Hunslope before in her life, and only some half-dozen times with his lordship—generally on such occasions as, riding round with his steward, he had called to solicit her husband's vote and interest for the Blues at the county election.

But Mrs. Heathcote did not see any good in letting the Battiscombes—and through them, all Market Basing—know this, and she shaped her course accordingly.

Lord Launton, recollecting that it was getting rather late, drove away in his father's carriage.

He expected to receive a sorrowing remonstrance from his mother; for the scion of the house founded by Cadwallader, had very clearly defined notions of the grades set out in the Table of Precedence—and sat, with his back to the horses, calmly awaiting it.

It did not come. All his mother said on the subject was comprised in a very few words: that Grace and Lucy Heathcote were very amiable girls, and had very good blood in their veins. William de Heathecoat, of Hunslope, was mentioned in Froissart.

Now you see the effect of Dick Mortiboy's candid confession to the earl. He had been deeply moved by the intelligence that a man so rich—so extraordinarily rich—was seriously promising not only to leave his very great fortune to his cousins, but also to endow them with a portion, when they should marry, fitting their future inheritance.

As for Mrs. Battiscombe, she went home with her maternal breast full of envy and uncharitable feeling, and spread the news all over Market Basing that Grace Heathcote had jilted poor Francis Melliship's

son, as she always said she would, and was trying to catch Lord Launton, as if—etc.

Mrs. Heathcote, on the other hand, was in an ecstasy of delight. She got down "Burke's Landed Gentry" from the book-case, and read all about William de Heathecote, of Hunslope. She compared the Heathcote pedigree with the Smiths—only city bankers, and so, like her own family, the great Mortiboy stock after all.

From these authentic records she drew her own conclusions; and every day she talked of Lord Launton, praised his personal appearance—the youth was by no means ill-looking, having a certain air of nobleness which comes of good breeding, and a mind kept steadily at a certain elevation—commended his manners, which had whatever merit belongs to shyness, and spoke in glowing terms of the happiness which would be the portion of that girl who might become his wife.

Now, all this fell upon the ears of Grace like the wind upon a fixed weathercock: it moved her not at all. She did not, to begin with, understand it. In the second place, she was too full of her own cares to think much about them. Least of all did she fancy that the heir of Hunslope Towers was about to propose to her.

"Really," she said, "I think, Lucy dear, that Lord Launton has—now, don't blush, my child, because it's quite possible, and you are very pretty—has fallen—fallen—fallen—shall I go on?"

"Grace, dear," said Lucy, blushing more than ever, "don't—please don't."

"Then I won't, Lucy."

And the very next day, Lord Launton proposed to her.

Proposed in the garden, just where Dick had made the same offer of his hand and heart. Stammered and blushed—stammered till he could hardly speak; told her, in an infinite amount of reduplicated words and any number of consonants, how he loved her.

Grace, this time, was neither pained nor touched. She only laughed.

"Poor boy!" she said. "Do you know that I don't love you at all, and never could? And do you know that you are the future Earl of Hunslope, and I only the daughter of a *very* plain gentleman?"

"I know," said Lord Launton. "B—b—but I have my father's permission, and your father's p—p—"

"Prohibition, I should hope," said Grace. "No, Lord Launton. No—NO—NO! There, is that enough?"

The poor young fellow stooped his head to hide his hot face.

"Do I seem unkind?" Grace asked. "See, Lord Launton, I do not mean to be unkind. I like you very much. I cannot understand how your father could give you permission to speak to me, or my father either. But you may know that I am already engaged—to Frank Melliship, your old schoolfellow."

"I knew—that is, I ought to have known. G—G—G—Grace, is there no hope?—not the least hope?"

"Not the least spark. Not a glimmer, Lord Launton. And, besides, you have never paid me any attentions at all. I thought you liked Lucy better."

"That was b—b—because I loved you."

"I don't profess to understand the workings of a man's love; but I do know this, that when Frank Melli-

ship loved me, he did not make pretence to my sister first. He came straight to me."

"I was wrong. Oh! Miss Heathcote, I'm a p—p—poor creature. I stammer, and am afraid almost to speak. Forgive my shyness."

"Indeed, there is nothing to forgive. But, pray, Lord Launton—no, I won't ask any more questions. Let all be as it was before. Come here as much as you like, and let us be friends. Shall it be so? Indeed, I am grateful for the honour—that is, I think I shall be, when I am an old woman. I shall remember that I had a chance of a coronet. But a woman can only love one man, and my love is promised—promised, Lord Launton."

She sighed wearily. Promised—and for how long?

Poor Lord Launton stood irresolute. His painful shyness interposed between himself and all his impulses. He beat it down, and said, with a mighty effort—

"Miss Heathcote, forget what I have said. I will endeavour to conquer my love for you. I am not a selfish egotist—that is, I will try not to be. If I can help your happiness, let me try to do so."

"You may help Frank, if you can. But alas! you cannot. Oh, Lord Launton, why have you brought this unlooked-for misery into the house?"

"What misery, my dear Miss Heathcote—what misery?"

"It is only that my poor dear mother will be dazzled by the chance that I have thrown away; and I shall have to endure her reproaches. Go, Lord Launton. If you must marry one of us, Lucy is a better match for you—not so stubborn, not so rebel-

lious, not so self-willed; and oh, a great deal prettier, more gentle, more Christian. She would make a better wife. Go away, my dear boy. Why, you are only a month older than I am—you are only a boy yet, Lord Launton. And I am as tall as you, see—" She smiled through her tears. "And oh, it is such a pity, because I was so fond of you."

She took his beardless face in her hands—she was really as tall as her admirer, and looked taller, with her pile of hair—and drew it towards her, and kissed him on the forehead.

"There, Ronald, Lord Launton, that is a sister's kiss. It would be hard to alter that. We have known each other as long as—oh, since we were little things, and used to meet you in the Pond Walk with your nurse. Be my friend—a great deal better for you, poor boy, than being my husband. Go, now, and come again just as usual."

It was a most ignominious dismissal. The heir of Hunslope Towers, conscious of having made himself an outrageous idiot, stole silently away. As he went through the house, he met Mrs. Heathcote. Truth to say, the poor lady had been to the highest rooms in the house, the servants' rooms, whose windows commanded a view of the heads of the performers in this garden act.

"Come in, Lord Launton, and talk to me," she said, graciously.

"No, Mrs. Heathcote," he stammered. "No—it's no use. She won't listen to me."

"Not listen to you? Nonsense! Not listen to you? Oh! give her time, Lord Launton. She's afraid of you."

"No—no—no. It is I who was af—f—fraid of

her," he groaned. "It is no use, Mrs. Heathcote—I am refused."

Mrs. Heathcote went back to her parlour, and sat in a tumult of conflicting passions. Presently her husband came home. She said nothing. Lucy returned from choir practice. Grace came down from her own room, her eyes red with crying. She sat silent, with a book before her. Mr. Heathcote rang the bell for supper at the usual time. They sat down, Mrs. Heathcote sighing heavily.

"What's the matter, old lady?" asked John, with a misgiving that a family row was impending.

For all reply, she burst into tears, and sighed hysterically. The girls ran to her assistance.

"Go away," she said to Grace. "Go away, ungrateful girl! After all I've done for you."

"Eh? eh? eh?" asked John, looking from one to the other. "What is it, Grace?"

"Wicked girl," cried her mother. "Oh! John, John—a coronet thrown away! Half a million of money thrown away! Grace, I was in the garden and heard you refuse your cousin a week ago; and now you have refused Lord Launton. John Heathcote, your daughter Grace refuses to marry either Dick Mortiboy or the future heir of Hunslope, because she loves a pauper—a pauper and a painter."

Grace turned to her father.

"Papa, Dick asked me to marry him, and Lord Launton asked me to marry him. I was obliged to say 'No,' because I am engaged to Frank."

Mr. Heathcote sat down to the table, and cut himself deliberately a great slice of cold boiled beef, with a meditative air. Then he took some pickles; and

then, having meanwhile turned the matter over in his mind, he said—

“Girls, sit down. Lydia, you’re a fool. Grace shall marry anybody she likes. Come here, my dear, and kiss your father.”

When John Heathcote put his foot down, which was very seldom, there was a general feeling in everybody’s mind that the thing was definitely settled. Mrs. Heathcote said no more; but, heaving a profound sigh, she rang the bell for a candle, and retired to bed, taking the Bible with her, so that she might, at least, have the consolations of religion.

CHAPTER XXI.

No intelligence of Frank's whereabouts. "We only know that he receives our letters," wrote Kate, "because he answers them. They go to the post-office, Great Bedford-street. His own have for the last two or three weeks been more despondent, that is, less cheerful than ever before. They have not the true ring about them that they had. I think, though, I dare not say so to mamma, that his good spirits are forced. I have written and told him about Dick's splendid offer. It is generous in the highest degree. It is more than generous. Tell him I think it is noble. I shall not write to him myself, till I have Frank's answer. Yes, Grace, my picture was accepted, hung and sold. I was at once glad to get the money, and sorry to let the picture go. I am doing another now, just a woodland scene—painted here in the mountains—with a single figure in it; a quiet picture, which I hope to succeed with. Only, when I have finished a picture I like, it goes to my heart to let it be sold. Frank keeps sending us money. It is such a pity, because we really do not want any. We have plenty. And we are happy again. Only nine months ago, Gracie, and what a difference!—what a difference!"

Thus far Kate Melliship. Grace showed the letter to Dick.

"There are two or three ways," he said, "of getting hold of Frank. A man can't hide himself altogether unless he cuts off communication by letter.

Evidently he doesn't want at present to be hunted up. All the same, I will go up to London and find him for you, Gracie."

"But how, Dick? How can you find him?"

"Well, I shall go to the post-office where his letters are sent. I shall ask them who takes his letters, and how often they are sent for. If they won't tell me, I shall bribe them till they do. They are sure to do it for half a sovereign. After that, we have only to go on the day when he appears, and lie in wait to catch him beautifully. Once my hand is on his shoulder, Grace, you may be quite sure that I don't let him go again till I bring him back to you."

"When will you go, Dick?" she asked eagerly. "To-morrow? Go to-morrow, and make haste. I've got some foolish sort of nervous feeling, as if something was going to happen. I don't know what, or how. I've had it for a week. I suppose I'm not very well."

"Thunder in the air," said Dick. "If anything happens, it will be something good for you. So be ready to jump for joy."

That evening he told his little boy of his intention to go to London, and, still suspicious that Polly, of whom he knew nothing beyond the fact that she drew her pound a-week, might return in his absence and carry off the boy, he told him to be ready in the morning to go to town with him.

The fast train from Market Basing leaves at nine o'clock, and is at Euston at half-past ten. They started to walk to the station, for Dick hated luggage and always kept changes of raiment and fine linen at his chambers in Jermyn-street. Crossing the river,

Dick bethought him that he had not seen his father for some days. So he passed through the garden into the house.

Mr. Mortiboy was in his bed. Hester was feeding him with a spoon; his breakfast consisting of bread and milk. He frowned at his son as usual, and then quietly took his milk a spoonful at a time until the basin was emptied. Dick sat by the side of his bed, and watched him eat. His appetite was very good; altogether there was a great change in him. The fixed smile had almost left his mouth, and the distortion of his face was much less noticeable. Then his eye was brighter, his memory better, the cloud seems to be gradually lifting from his mind. As his son sat by his bedside watching Hester feed the old man, and thinking of all that had happened, suddenly there flashed upon his memory an old, old day, so long ago that it had never once come back to him: a day more than a quarter of a century old: an autumn day like the present, when the golden tints were on the leaves; a morning when a child he walked hand-in-hand with his father, and asked him questions. He remembered how his father, lifting him in his arms, stroked his cheeks and kissed him; how he flung his own arms round his neck and kissed his father again. A simple childish caress; it might have occurred a thousand times to most children; to Dick it seemed only to have occurred once, because Mr. Mortiboy was an undemonstrative man, and with him such events were rare. As he remembered this, another thought came upon him: it was, that never once since that day, save when his own crime caused relapse, had his father's love ceased to burn in a steady flame. He knew it now: he re-

cognised it even in the starved and pinched life he had been made to lead: even in the tyranny of his youth; even in the hard work and long hours to which his father subjected him—all this was to make him grow up like himself—and in the ready confidence and trust with which he received the prodigal home. He knew it all, in a single moment, and a sharp pain shot through him as he looked upon the wreck he had himself caused.

Dick was not one, however, to sit down and weep, throwing ashes upon his head and clothing himself with sackcloth. The thought came to him, as one which might often come again, a grave and saddening thought; his thoughts turned upon the boy whom he had adopted. Suppose little Bill should do something, should turn out somehow like himself. Then he cleared his throat, which was getting husky, and bent slightly over his father—Old Hester had left them alone together.

“Father,” he said, “let us be friends again—I am sorry.”

The old man moved his slow eyes upwards with a puzzled expression.

Dick looked at him, waiting, but no response came.

He joined the boy, and they set off together to walk to the station.

When Hester came back, she found Mr. Mortiboy looking troubled, and a tear or two had rolled down his withered cheeks.

“Bill,” said Dick, in the train—he was quite accustomed to converse on all topics with the boy, who understood or not, as the case might be—“Bill, I

wonder if we are going to have a collision and bust up."

"Why, Uncle Dick?"

"Because the Mexicans say that when a man is going to die he begins to think about the days when he was a child. That's what I've been doing this morning. The only way you can be killed in this peaceful old country is by a railway accident."

"I saw a boy once, run over by a 'bus," said Bill, thoughtfully.

"Yes—there are other ways, I suppose. But a smash on a railway is the most likely thing. Perhaps, after all, the Mexicans are not always right."

There was no railway accident, at any rate.

At his chambers he found a letter, dated a fortnight and more back, from Lafleur.

"My dear Dick," it ran, "I am in want of money. Please send me a couple of hundred at once."

"In any case," said Dick, "it is too late now. Want of money? What has been done with the five thousand? The System has come to grief, I suppose, after all?"

It was not pleasant to think about. The man had been started actually with all the money he asked. The partnership was dissolved; the pair had separated, each agreed to go his own way, and yet, only two months after, came this letter. Dick crushed it in his fingers, looking stern and determined.

"It shall not be," he said, thinking aloud. "Polly is gone, and Lafleur shall go. I will have no witnesses left to remind me of the old days. I will live my own life now, with the boy to bring up. Lafleur shall not be with us to bring back what I would forget. No, M.

Alcide Lafleur, it will not do. Your own secrets are as bad as mine, and worse. You dare not speak, at any rate. I will give you one more start, on condition that you go away to California, or somewhere over the water, and never come back again. You shall not stand in my way. I defy any man to stand in my way. My path is clear and certain. I will start Frank and Ghrimes. Then I will go away and stay away for ten years with the boy. And then I will come back, and put him out in life, and settle down. I shall be turned forty then. I shall never marry. I have said so. There will be other children then, Grace's children, to amuse me. I shall spend the rest of my life, thirty years and more, among the children."

He took no notice of the letter, and went on to the post-office, to find out Frank, if possible. It was a poor little post-office, kept by a bookseller in a small way, perhaps a man who should be described as one who sold small books. Specimens of his ware were in the window, cheap religious books mostly, and the doorway was filled with the *affiche* boards of daily papers.

Dick found a woman behind the counter, and stated his business.

"I—I—don't think it's hardly regular," she said. "People come and get their letters here, but I don't know that I ought to tell you anything about them."

"There's five shillings, now you will tell me."

It was blunt, but effective. The woman took the shillings, put them in her pocket, and went on at once.

"I don't know anything about the gentleman who has the letters addressed to him as Mr. Melliship.

Sometimes he comes, a tall, fair-haired young man, quite the gentleman; sometimes it's a young person."

"A girl, you mean? A young lady?"

She smiled superior, and tossed her head.

"Not a lady, I should say, certainly. At least, I wouldn't compare her with myself. A young woman, sir."

"Pretty, as well as young?"

She bridled up. "That's a matter of opinion. I don't hold with a pink and rose face, and a bit of false hair."

"Is that all you can tell me?"

"That's all, sir, I'm sorry to say."

"Then you've taken five shillings out of me on false pretences," said Dick, pretending to be in a rage. "I've a great mind to report you to head quarters." The woman turned all colours. "Well, I won't this time, if you'll tell Mr. Melliship, or the young person, the next time the letters are asked for, that his cousin has been to see him, and wants him particularly. On what day does the young person come?"

"On Monday morning, always, sir, about eleven o'clock, unless he comes himself. Quite the gentleman, *he* is."

He was in the neighbourhood of Gray's Inn-road, and thought of Mrs. Kneebone's; he took his way down that thoroughfare with a view of finding out if Polly had been there, and what she had done.

Sitting at the entrance of the court was the boy Thoozy, looking wistfully down in the direction of Holborn. It was down the street that little Bill had gone with the swell; and he naturally expected that it

was by that way he would return. Dick touched him on the shoulder.

He jumped up on his crutches, and grinned a perfect pæan of joy.

"Well, Thoozy," said Dick, "and how's things?"

"How's little Bill?" returned Thoozy.

"Well and strong. He sent you a message a little while ago by a tramp. Didn't you get it?"

"Never," said Thoozy. "Never. What was it?"

"Only to send his love, and you were not to forget him."

"I never forgets him," said the poor boy. "I got no one to talk to now he's gone; and the old woman's took on dreadful with drink ever since the day Polly Tresler came."

"Ah! what was that? Tell me all about it, boy. Come into the court and sit on your own step."

Mrs. Kneebone saw them coming up the road, and trembled. Was further information wanted, and should she expose herself to another assault, of an aggravated nature? She decided at once on her line of action, and, putting on her shawl, she took a jug, and a big key, so as to show that she meant business, and sallied down the steps.

"Me-thew-salem," she said, with great sweetness. "I'm obliged for to go out a little bit. Take care of them blessed children while I'm away. Good morning, sir. And it's hoping you found all that I told you c'rrect."

Dick nodded his head, and she passed on, seeing no prospect of further coin. "Now, Thoozy," said Dick, "tell me all about it."

If Methusalem had been born in a somewhat higher sphere of life; if he had not been lame; if his flesh, which was weak, had been equal to his spirit, which was strong; if he had been educated for the stage; he might have made a low comedian of a very unusual kind. His talent was prodigious, but his training was defective.

With an instinctive feeling that a vivid picture of Mrs. Kneebone's discomfiture and Polly's subsequent disaster would be appreciated, Thoozy enacted the whole scene with a dramatic *verve* which set the tragedy vividly before his listener. The boy forgot his lameness and infirmity, mimicked their voices, alternately doing Mrs. Kneebone with her conciliatory hypocrisy, and Polly with her sulky disbelief. When he put in the finishing touch of Mrs. Kneebone's really illnatured remark about himself, Dick roared with laughter.

"Look here, boy," he said, "you are not very anxious, I suppose, to stay here all your life?"

"I'm an old man," said Thoozy, with a comical leer. "I'm getting very old, and past work. I used to think I'd stay on here all my days; but now little Bill is gone, and I get nobody to talk to, I think a change might do me good. My doctor did recommend," he added, waving his hand grandly, "that I should take six months' holiday, and go to one of our country seats. With port wine. Says I must drink port wine, three glasses a day. As the resident physician, I couldn't spare the time; but if you press me very hard, I might get away for a bit. I say, sir," he went on, in a changed voice, "let me see little Bill again. I won't do him no harm. I never did that I

knows on. Let me have a talk with him once more, only once."

Dick hesitated. Why should he not take the boy away? With all his quaint affectations, his oddities, and infirmities, he could do no harm to his adopted son. Why not take him too? He took out a card case, and printed his address on a card in pencil.

"I live here. You can read that? Good. Jermyn-street, off Regent-street. Now be careful, and listen. Little Bill is with me there. You make your way at once to St. James's Park. Wait about the door of the Duke of York's Column. I will send Bill to you, or bring him if he doesn't know the way."

"Bill not know the way! He knows his way, like a ferret, all over London, even where he hasn't been. Bill wasn't along with me for nothing."

"Good. You two boys may spend the whole day together; bring him back to Jermyn-street at nine. As the clock strikes, mind."

"I will. Sharp at nine."

Dick considered a moment.

"Bill's got good clothes now, too," he said. "Would you like some decent things to put on?"

Thoozy looked at his old coat and his torn trousers, and sighed.

"Come, then. I know a man close by."

He took him to the same dealer who had refitted little Bill, and provided him with a suit of clothes, including stockings—quite unknown to Thoozy, except by hearsay, up to that time—better than he had ever dreamed of.

"Now you've plenty of time, go into Endell-street,

and have a bath, brush your hair, and make yourself quite respectable."

He gave him a few shillings to complete his arrangements, and walked away.

Thoozy went back to the court, amid the jeers of the populace—who recognized him, in spite of his grandeur—just to see that the babies were not coming to any harm, rescuing an infant from imminent suffocation, by reason of a corner of the sheet, which it mistook, through want of experience, for the mouth of a feeding bottle. Thoozy shook them all up, and went his way.

It was one o'clock when Dick got back to Jermyn-street.

"There's a friend of yours wants to see you very much," he said to his ward.

"Thoozy! Thoozy!" cried the boy, with delight.

"That is the party. Are you hungry, Bill?"

"Very little, Uncle Dick."

"Got any money?"

Little Bill produced two and fourpence from his pocket.

"Go on, then. You can have your dinner with Methusalem, where you like. You know your way to the Duke of York's Column. Wait there till you see him."

Dick Mortiboy lunched in his own room, and then smoked the cigar of content and happiness. He embodied his discoveries at the Post Office in Great Bedford-street, in a short note to Grace Heathcote, and despatched it to the pillar box by the woman who was in charge. This was the purport of it:—"Frank calls for his letters, or has them called for by

a young woman every Monday morning. We must wait till then. Next Monday I will be there."

It was about three o'clock that a man, all in rags and tatters, rang at the door bell. The old woman in charge—all the other lodgers were out of town—opened it and looked at him with suspicion.

"I want Mr. Mortiboy."

"Give me your name, and I'll see," she said.

"He knows me. Let me pass."

The man pushed by her, and mounted the stairs. Dick's sitting-room was at the back, second floor, a small room, but big enough for his purposes. He had, besides, a bedroom for himself, with a dressing-room in which was a bed for the boy.

He was sitting over his third cigar. He never read books, having lost the habit of reading long since. Sometimes he looked at the newspaper, but not often. He was, therefore, like Captain Bowker in one respect, that all his ideas were his own. To-day he was more happy and contented than he had ever been before since his return. All was going well with him. Grace would not have him. Very good

"If she be not fair to me,
What care I how fair she be?"

a quotation he certainly would have made, if he had known it. Unromantic as it may seem, Dick cured himself of his passion by the simple expedient of giving the girl up. He loved her no longer. Men only really love a girl—with that blind, passionate devotion which burns her image upon their heart in indelible characters, like a tattoo on the arm—between the ages of twenty and thirty. After that—experience,

Men past the sixth lustrum know womankind better. They know the other sex because they know their own. They know that no women are perfect, and they suspect their own passion. Now suspicion to passion is like the sunshine to a coal fire—puts it out. Dick gave up his love with a mighty effort, because it was very strong. But having given it up, he gave it up altogether. There is no half measures with Dick. Thorough at all times. If Grace had accepted him, no husband could have been more true and more faithful than he, more attentive, more thoughtful. Just as he had been a thorough rogue, just as he was going to be a thorough “respectable,” just so he would have been a thorough lover. But it could not be; and therefore, as a philosopher, he acknowledged that it was better not to think of it. Now his plans were changed. To go away altogether, to take the boy with him he was now considering—even the thought of taking Thoozy, too, had crossed his mind—to come back after many years. This was his new programme. As he lay back in his easy chair, his handsome face breathed a sweet spirit of hope and cheerfulness, and with every fresh cloud of tobacco came another castle of contentment and repose.

His door opened. He looked round to see who it was, but started to his feet at sight of the miserable object before him. Alcide Lafleur stood in the doorway. Ragged, starving, pinched, and footsore, his old partner stood there in front of him, staring at him with haggard eyes.

“Good God! man,” he said, “what is this?”

“Did you not get my letter, Dick?”

“To-day, this morning. What is this?”

"First give me money to get food and clothes. I am almost starving."

Dick thrust all the money in his pockets into Lafleur's hands. "Go quickly. Get things, and then come back. Take my latch-key, and return as soon as you can."

Lafleur took the money and the key, and crept away.

Dick lit another cigar. But the current of his thoughts was rudely disturbed. The clouds of tobacco were angry and threatening now, and filled with coloured pictures. He filled and drank three or four glasses of wine in succession. Then he sat down doggedly to wait, with his hands in his pockets. Presently the old woman came up.

"If you don't want me, sir," she said, "I've particular business, and should like to go out this afternoon."

She resented the appearance of lodgers in September, when everybody, including the landlady, was away; and she was not inclined to put herself about, to please anybody.

"Oh yes," said Dick; "you can go. I'm not likely to want anything. Be back by nine; the boy's coming in then, and will want some supper."

It was a little before six when the front door slammed and a footfall sounded on the stairs.

A moment afterwards, M. Alcide Lafleur, washed, shaven, trimmed, and dressed, darkened the threshold of his old partner's room. He was rehabilitated and, at least, externally restored to the semblance of his former state.

"*Sacré!*" he exclaimed, pinching up the sleeve of his new coat and turning it round. "What a climate!"

There were great rain spots on it. He wiped his new hat with his new cambric handkerchief.

"Never mind the rain," said Dick Mortiboy. "Now tell me all about it. How came you to get into such a mess?"

"Light your gas, first, my friend," said Lafleur; "it is cursedly dark in this little hole——"

It was dark; the clouds were black: a thunderstorm had burst over London.

Dick put a match to his gas.

"Young Ready-money is the sobriquet the respectable citizens of your native village have conferred on their philanthropic millionaire," he continued, with that thin, sneering smile of his on his face. "I think if Alcide Lafleur had either the title or the money he would somewhere in London have found an apartment more distinguished than this is."

He looked round Dick's simple sitting-room and shrugged his shoulders. Gentlemen of his temperament soon recover themselves. Lafleur had already recovered. He was the same man that had got Dick Mortiboy out of the prison in Palmiste; that had traded with him, run the blockade with him, gambled, swindled, and lied with him. Lafleur was unchanged. But his partner was no longer Roaring Dick, and the company of his old companion was distasteful to him, his voice grated on his ear.

"The rooms do for me, Lafleur: nobody knows me, and if they did it would not matter."

"Always so careless, so rough. My dear Richard, if I had your money," he heaved a sigh: he thought of what he had given up in giving back Dick's word to him. "Ah! how unfortunate I have been—how lucky,

you! and you are content with a hammock, a beefsteak, and a pot of beer!"

"Have you actually lost all?" asked Dick abruptly.

"My cursed luck," replied Lafleur, looking at the rain beating down the window. "How it pelts! *Ma foi!*"

"Never mind the rain; tell me all about it," said Dick a second time; and Lafleur told his story. It took him half an hour to tell it, but briefly it was the story of every man who ever went to Hombourg to break the bank—except that lucky thousandth one who breaks it. At first, luck was with Lafleur; night after night he went home with every pocket stuffed with gold pieces.

"Dick, if you had been with me I should have landed the grand *coup*—twice—instead of beggaring myself. You have pluck—dash—*élan*. You would have carried out the System and piled the money on. I was a coward; I hesitated. It came to putting down two thousand in one stake—the bank had been winning enormously, they would have covered any stake—the cards seemed bedevilled. And I dared not do it. Like a mad fool I left the table. Dick, the next time did it. If I had only had pluck I should have landed myself with a profit of five thousand pounds on the run." He laughed—"As I always told you, the more the run was against you the more you must win—at the end. My System is perfect. I was the fool."

"Well," said Dick Mortiboy, "you had lost all?"

"Stay. Half—all my winning and half the money I took with me. Cool as I am, old hand as I am, my dear Richard, my nerve was gone—for the time. Not at the run against me. At my contemptible folly. I

ran over to Wiesbaden and played a week at roulette. I won a five hundred there and then came back to Hombourg. The very same cursed luck attended me again. I had not pluck to put all my money down at one stake. I hesitated and was lost again. My head was gone. I deserted my System and played with the reckless folly of a madman—”

“And you were cleaned out?”

“Lost every farthing. But, Dick, you would have saved me. The System is perfect. Carry it out, and I defy you to lose—my want of pluck beat me.”

“A cool player, Lafleur, but you always wanted courage.”

“When all was gone I thought of you. I knew you would never turn your back on an old friend. I thought I would come back here to you for more money.” Dick’s face, as he heard this confession, grew hard. “I sold my clothes, and my rings, and watch; but I lost money on the way. I had only enough left to bring me to Newhaven. Dick, I have walked from Newhaven to London on tenpence, one franc, upon my honour. Of all my possessions, I have got nothing left but the six shooter you gave me ten years ago.”

Dick got up and began to pace the room.

“Lafleur, let me say what I think, and then you shall speak. Our partnership is dissolved. You have given me back my word. You know that I never say things unless I mean them—when I sought that dissolution, I meant a complete severance of our connection. I meant that you should have no claim upon me—not the least—for the future. I belong to a different world henceforth. Go your way, and let me go mine. That is what I mean still. I am not sur-

prised that the System has broken down—they always do. No man ever yet could invent, or will invent, a scheme to meet the chances of luck. When it isn't luck, it is skill. Now you know exactly what I mean, state exactly what you want me to do."

Lafleur turned white. Tell an inventor that his model is worthless, the model over which he has grown grey: tell a poet that his poem is balderdash, the poem over which he has spent his life: tell a mathematician that his integrals are as useless as the mediæval scholasticism, those integrals on which he has sacrificed his youth—do all these things with impunity—you will only wound. But do not tell a gambler that his scheme is a mistake and a delusion. You will madden him.

He clutched the arm of his chair, but said nothing. Dick went on.

"You know, Lafleur, in spite of our dissolution, that I cannot let an old friend come to grief without my trying to help him. Now I will do this for you—I will give you five hundred now, on condition that you go to America, and I will send you a thousand when I know you have arrived. Think it over."

"Go partners again with me, Dick, only in the System, you know. Come over to Hombourg, and play it yourself, with your own splendid luck. Dick, we must win, I am certain we must win. Bring ten thousand with you. I will be a half-partner, a quarter-partner, anything. Only let us try it once more."

"No."

Lafleur made no further effort. He knew his man.

"I accept," he said after a few minutes.

Dick took his cheque book and drew a cheque on his London agents for five hundred pounds.

"What is the day of the month? the twenty-third? I have filled it in with the twenty-second. Never mind, it will be all the same. Keep the condition, Lafleur, or I don't keep mine."

"Some men would threaten you, Dick," said Lafleur, pocketing the cheque. "I do not. I think you are treating me hardly, but I do not threaten."

"I should like to see the man who would threaten me," said Dick calmly.

Lafleur, whose whole bearing was changed, who had lost his ease and assurance, made no answer to this remark.

"Give me some brandy," he said after a pause; "I am a good deal shaken, I don't quite know what I am saying."

He drank a glass neat, and then had a tumbler of brandy and water mixed half-and-half fashion.

"*Voilà*. I feel better," he said, putting on a little of his old style.

He walked to the windows and looked out.

"How cursedly it pours down. What are we to do?"

"You can stay and smoke a cigar."

They smoked for some minutes in unbroken silence. The only sound in the room was the pelting of the rain against the window panes.

"Dick, may I propose half an hour at euchre?" he said this doubtingly, half afraid that Dick would refuse. "It is a long time since we played—we may never play again together—let us have a last game."

"I don't mind playing a game or two, Lafleur," he

said. He took out his watch, "It is half-past seven now, I shan't play after nine; I shall leave off as the clock strikes. I've got an engagement then."

The first half-hour was over. The clock struck eight and the rain had ceased. The luck was all on Dick's side. He had won thirty pounds of Lafleur. It was scored down on a piece of paper.

"Shall we leave off? You're not in luck, and I don't want to win."

Lafleur begged him to go on. "Lend me ten again." Dick passed the money over the table, and made the score on the paper forty. At half-past eight the debt was a hundred.

"I won't take the money of you," said Dick.

"You shall take it," said Lafleur, tossing off another glass of brandy, "if you leave off a winner. Come on, deal the cards, we have only half-an-hour."

When half of that half-hour was gone, Dick Mortiboy sprang from his chair, leaned across the table, and brought his hand heavily upon the sleeve of his adversary's coat. In it was a knave, the best card at euchre, which Dick dragged forth.

"Swindler," he cried, "you would even cheat me." He pushed back his chair, turned over the table, and flung the cards in Lafleur's face. "Give me back my cheque," he said sternly, "I have done with you."

Without saying a word, the Frenchman flew at him like a tiger cat. Dick stepped lightly aside, and received him with his left. He fell heavily. He rose again, however, in a moment, and went at him again. A second time he fell. This time he lay on the carpet with a livid face, and for a moment appeared not to

move. But his white hand stole stealthily to his coat pocket. He half turned as if to rise, Dick watching him with flashing eyes, and then—then—the sharp crack of a pistol, a column of smoke, a heavy fall, and Dick Mortiboy lying flat on his face. Lafleur started to his feet. He had shot his adversary as he lay, without taking the pistol from his pocket. He leaned over Dick for a moment; he did not move; he turned him on his back; his eyes were closed: he breathed heavily. He unbuttoned the waistcoat: the bullet had entered his chest: he saw stains of blood upon his shirt. Then he went outside to the landing, and listened. Not a sound. He went to Dick's open desk. In it were about twelve sovereigns and some notes. He took ten pounds in gold, leaving the notes: put two of them in Dick's pocket. The keys were in the desk. He locked it, and placed them on the mantelpiece. He did this to prevent suspicion of robbery. Next he picked up the table, and hid the cards away, and put the furniture straight. Then he drank another glass of brandy.

One thing he had forgotten—the pistol—he laid it in the hand of the fallen man. As he placed it in Dick's hand, the fingers clutched over it.

And then he took his hat and glided out of the room.

He came back a moment after, and bent over Dick's face.

Dick neither moved nor spoke.

Enough. Lafleur stole gently away, down the stairs, out of the house, stepping softly through the door. He closed it after him, but the latch did not hold. The

clock of St. James's church began to strike the hour of nine as he reached Piccadilly.

There was not a soul in the house. Jermyn-street, in September, is a howling wilderness. No one, save people at the back, heard the pistol shot. No one saw Lafleur enter or go away, and Dick Mortiboy lay supine, the wet beads of death clustering on his forehead, his life blood welling away from his wound.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT did he think of, as he lay there?—of his wild life, his lawlessness, his crimes?—of the singular chance which had landed him on the shores of respectability and fortune?—of his aims and hopes for the future? A man's thoughts when Death stares him in the face, are comprehensive. He thinks of all. In a dream, even of half a minute's duration, you may live through a lifetime. The Eastern monarch dipped his head into a tub of water, and straightway left his sultanship and became a wanderer for twenty years. At the end of that time he found himself lifting his head out of the water again. This adventure had taken him one minute to accomplish. A man told me that he slipped once in the Alps, and glided for two or three hundred feet, expecting instant death. He was pulled up, I forget how, and saved from death; but in that brief space he lived all his life over again. The dying thief upon the cross,—model and ensample of all who repent at the last moment,—at the close of his last hour, when suffering gave way to torpor, and

physical pain, one would fain hope, became only a deadened misery, may so have lived in a moment through all his life, and seen clearly what might have been.

Who can tell what thoughts crowded into the brain of poor Dick Mortiboy, lying there alone and untended, stricken to death? I, for one, cannot. I only know that he was softened and changed of late weeks: that many things had quite suddenly become clear to him; that the old carelessness was changing into gravity; that he was beginning to recognise the evil of his ways; that life had changed its aspect. Wealth had done this for him; wealth that works in many ways, turning the unselfish man into the voluptuary; or the selfish man into one who lives and cares wholly for others. Wealth brings with it its curse or its blessing, just as its recipient is disposed. It is a means to make a Tiberius, or it may make its ——— Here the law of libel interferes, or I might name one who has great wealth, a giant's strength, and owns it but as a trust for the improvement, as best he can, of his fellows, a single-hearted, honest man, a rich man, for whom the needle's eye is as easy to pass, as for the poorest pauper who breathes with resignation and dies with joy. So would it have been for my Dick Mortiboy. But at the moment when the tide was turned came the stroke of fate, and he who might have done so much, was forbidden to do anything. Ah! the pity of it—the pity of it.

At nine o'clock—before the old woman returned—came back the boys from their day's holiday. Laughing, radiant, happy, little Bill, followed by his limping

companion, strangely diffident now, with his changed and glorified "young 'un," sprang up the steps of the house in Jermyn-street. They found the door open.

"Come in, Thoozy; come up with me. Uncle Dick said you was to come, you know."

Thoozy followed up the stairs, while Bill, running before with the impetuosity of a Peter, reached the door of Dick's chamber, and opened it.

The lamp was out. They stood in darkness. Only on the floor before them a black form.

Bill stopped and looked. A blank dread filled his soul. He trembled; he dared not speak. Behind him he heard Thoozy's crutch as he limped up the stairs. He waited.

"What's that, Thoozy?" he whispered, pointing to the floor.

Thoozy did not answer. The light on the staircase was in his eyes, and he could see nothing. The two boys, clinging to each other, stood shivering with fear, as in the doorway Thoozy made out, in the twilight, the figure of a man upon the floor.

"Go and get a light," he whispered. "Run, quick. Do you know where to find one?"

"They've always one on the stairs," replied the other. "Don't move, Thoozy; don't move!"

He disappeared. As soon as he was gone, Thoozy entered the room, and, kneeling down, felt the face of the man who lay so still. It was that of Uncle Dick. He knew it by the long silken beard. A whisper reached his ears.

"Go—fetch a doctor quick. Get a light—water, for God's sake."

Bill returned at the moment. Thoozy snatched

the candle from him, and got a *carafe* from the bedroom, from which he poured a few drops into the dying man's mouth. He sprinkled his face. And then little Bill, who had watched him with pale face and trembling lips, fell headlong on the ground, weeping and sobbing, kissing the cheeks and lips of his patron, and crying in his agony—"Oh! Uncle Dick—Uncle Dick."

"Give him more water," said Thoozy; "I am going out for a doctor. Don't let him move till I come back."

Thoozy limped away, forgetting his crutch, and poor little Bill heard him descend step by step.

He was left alone with Dick. Terrors of every kind assailed his heart. He could not speak. All he could do was to lie along the floor, his cheek against Dick's to feel him breathing, to know that he was living. . . . Minutes that seemed hours passed slowly away. At last he heard footsteps again. Thoozy was returning, bringing some one with him. It was the doctor. Thoozy's good sense led him into Waterloo-place, where he knew there was a policeman; of him he got the address of the nearest surgeon. The policeman went with him, suspecting something wrong. The doctor was at home, and came at once.

He took the candle and began to examine his patient. A weak whisper greeted him.

"I have had an accident," Dick murmured feebly. "Half an hour ago—an old pistol—shot myself in the side—no one in the house to help me—left side—don't move me—I am bleeding to death."

"More light," said the doctor. "Boy, light that lamp."

It was a moderator, the mechanism of which was unknown to Thoozy.

The policeman lit it.

Then the doctor unbuttoned the waistcoat and looked for the wound. On the floor lay the pistol; he trod upon it. The policeman took it, and after carefully looking at it, placed it in his pocket.

"One chamber fired," he murmured. "Who is he?" he asked Thoozy.

"I don't know. He knows. Bill knows. He was a goin' to do something for me; he gave me these clothes to-day, and told me to come at nine," sobbed Thoozy.

"Who is it?" The policeman called to little Bill.

"Mr. Mortiboy," said Bill, as if all the world knew him.

"Does he live here always?"

"No: he lives at Market Basing," said Bill, trembling, in spite of the last few weeks' experience, at sight of a policeman. "He's my Uncle Dick."

"He isn't really his uncle," whispered Thoozy. "He took care o' little Bill. He's no relation at all—told me so himself."

Meantime the doctor was at work. His face grew very grave. Dick opened his eyes with an effort, and looked at him.

"How long?" he asked.

"It is a very serious accident," began the doctor.

"How long?" repeated Dick, in a hoarse whisper.

"Perhaps half an hour."

"Take paper, and let me make a statement to save trouble."

"Speak very low," whispered the doctor, "I can

hear. Do not exert yourself more than you can possibly help."

Dick began in a faint voice—

"I—Richard—Melliship—Mortiboy—declare that I—have—accidentally shot myself, while preparing to clean my pistol."

You see, he was true to his old partner to the very last. Went out of the world with a lie on his lips, to save him.

The doctor wrote.

"Place the pen in my hand and guide me. I want to sign it, in presence of yourself and the policeman," said the dying man.

It was done. With faltering fingers Dick traced his name for the last time.

"Have you any testamentary depositions to make or alter?"

"Give me—water,—brandy,—something."

They held up his head—the forehead dank and cold, the cheeks pale, the eyes only opening from time to time with an effort—and the doctor gave him a spoonful of brandy. This revived him a little.

"Write," he said.

"Dearest Cousin Gracie, I am dying. You can find Frank easily. All my money will be yours and Lucy's. Let Frank and Ghrimes be partners. God bless you, my dear. If I had lived I would have—"

Here he stopped. Presently he went on again—

"Remember that I love you for all you have done for me, but that I give you up freely and entirely. Let the money go back to help the poor as much as may be."

He stopped again. Another spoonful of brandy.

"Tell my father—" Here he paused; a strange look of bewilderment crossed his face. "Ah!" he sighed, "it is no use now to tell him anything. I shall tell him myself."

The doctor thought he was wandering.

"Where is little Bill?" he whispered.

The doctor put the child's face to his.

"Oh, Uncle Dick! Don't die! Don't die, Uncle Dick!"

Dick kissed the tear-wet cheek that lay upon his cheek, and his head fell back.

"Poor little chap," he murmured.

They were his last words. A moment after, without a sigh or a groan, he turned his head to one side—they had brought a pillow from the bedroom—and opened his eyes no more. Dick was dead. Ah! the pity of it—the pity of it.

"Coroner's inquest," said the policeman. "Were you here, my boys?"

"No," said Thoozy. "We found him here. He told us to come at nine."

"Can we telegraph?" said the doctor.

"Who to? We may look in the desk. These boys can't help us. Go to bed, my lads," he said, in a kindly voice. "You can't do any good here."

They searched the desk. No sign of an address.

There were no cards upon him, and no letters.

"We might," said the policeman, "we might send to the police office of Market Basing for information."

Thoozy followed little Bill to his bedroom. Both were crying and lamenting.

"Bill," said Thoozy, after a pause, "it's all over;

he won't help you and me no more. He's dead, is Uncle Dick. Why couldn't I die? I'm no use in the world to nobody. I've got no money; I've only got rheumatiz. Why couldn't I die, and Uncle Dick live? Come, Bill, it's no use stopping here no longer. Let's go, you and me."

"Not back to Mother Kneebone's," said Bill.

"No, not back to Kneebone's. Let's go a long way off, miles away, where they won't find us, and live together. How much money have you got, Bill?"

"I've got a sovereign. He gave it me yesterday."

"I've got three shillin'. He gave it me to-day, and we've got our clothes. Let's go, Bill."

He took the child by the arm, and they stepped out stealthily upon the stairs, and crept down, Thoozy leaning on Bill.

When they got into the street, Thoozy led the way eastward. They passed through Covent-garden, and down Drurylane. They walked up Fleet-street, Ludgate-hill, Cheapside, and so on to the Whitechapel-road. In fulness of time, after many stoppages—for they slept an hour on this doorstep, and an hour on that—they arrived, when day broke, somewhere in the East End of London, where there were masts of ships innumerable.

"It's the docks," said Thoozy. "Now we'll wait and look about us."

In the afternoon of that fatal day old Hester was pushing Mr. Mortiboy's Bath-chair slowly round the broad gravel paths, according to her wont, in front of the house in Derngate. Lucy Heathcote walked by her uncle's side, now and then saying a kind word to

the old man, to rouse and cheer him. She had been more hopeful of his recovery of late days; the worst symptoms had improved; his eyes were brighter; he had begun to be interested in little things about him; and his features had gained back something of their old expression. In her hand was the Bible, from which she was reading favourite passages to her uncle. In health he never would be "read to," in his sickness he made no sign of dissent. Lucy's presence soothed him. He loved to have her near him. She knew he liked to hear her voice, though his poor palsied wits seemed to have neither memory nor understanding. So she read on.

She was stopped by a loud cry from Hester.

"Oh! Miss Lucy! look at your uncle, miss! Oh! what *shall* we do!"

Lucy dropped her Bible. The old man's face was suddenly distorted fearfully, and he lay back on his pillows breathing heavily and laboriously. He had had another stroke. The girl thought he would die there; Hester was helpless from fright.

"Run—run—for the nurse—then send for Dr. Kirby—don't lose a second," cried Lucy.

The nurse came from her tea with her mouth full of bread and butter. She was calm and unmoved in the young girl's grief and the old servant's terror. She was quite equal to the situation. It had been her business to see people die. She showed her superiority by giving her orders calmly.

Hester was despatched for the doctor.

"There's death in his face, miss. Let us take him in. He won't be with us many hours now."

Sobbing grievously, Lucy lent her hand to wheel

the dying man into his bedroom. The window opened on to the lawn.

"Oh, how horrible it seems, nurse! Oh! let us try to get him out of his chair! Oh! poor Uncle Richard—my dear—my dear!"

He was a heavy weight—dead weight—for he could not move hand or foot—both sides were palsied now; but the arms of the nurse were as strong as a man's. With little help from Lucy she got him on to his bed.

The girl—sole one among his relatives who had ever *loved* old Ready-money Mortiboy—fell on her knees by the bedside and prayed to God.

The old man turned his eyes towards her. She saw he was still conscious.

"Oh! uncle," she implored, "try—try to pray—try to follow my words. Uncle Richard," she cried in an agony of grief, "oh! Uncle Richard—try to make your peace with God."

But Mr. Mortiboy was unconscious again.

The doctors came in a few minutes. Their language was plain; they did not try to disguise the truth. The period of the old man's life might be reckoned in minutes. They could do nothing—but they stayed to see the end.

Ghrimes was sent for. He alone knew Dick's London address. It was past eight o'clock before he came back from the country, where he had been on business. He came—touched his old master's powerless, helpless hand, and hurried away to the telegraph office to summon Dick from London. Vain errand!

For five hours from the time of his last stroke the old man lay on his bed like one dead. He breathed,

but every moment with less strength. To Lucy Heathcote it seemed like five days. Her father and mother were there with her, but she thought only of him who lay dying with them all round his bed.

The death struggle came at nine o'clock. There was an inarticulate sound first from the old man's lips. Then he *spoke*. They all heard it.

He said—"My—son—Dick," and lay there dead.

"Dick ought to be here at half-past ten," John Heathcote whispered to his wife.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DICK's letter to Grace arrived at Parkside before the news of his death, which was brought by one of the bank clerks sent out by Ghrimes at eight o'clock. Grace was reading the letter which promised to find Frank in the course of a week, and had just passed it over to her father, who read it with much satisfaction. Mrs. Heathcote, too, read it, but with different feelings, which she was studying how to express with due effect, when the messenger of evil tidings from the bank arrived in Dick's own dog-cart.

The farmer was with him for five minutes. He came back with pale cheeks and quivering lips.

"Dick," he gasped, "Dick . . . he's gone . . . dead . . . he shot himself by accident last night, and died an hour afterwards. Poor Dick! poor Dick!" He recovered after a little. "Strange they both died at the same hour. A telegram came to the police office this

morning at eight. They sent round to Ghrimes. Ghrimes has sent for me. Poor Dick! poor Dick!"

The presence of a tragic event like this melted for a moment the animosity of her mother to Grace. They fell into each other's arms, sobbing and crying. Dick was dead. Dick the generous: Dick the noble: Dick the true and brave. Dick was dead. Nor was it for a full half-hour that Mrs. Heathcote, recovering herself the first, was able dimly to realize the change that this event might cause to her. Dick was dead—alas! poor Dick! But then—but then—all the fortune—the half million of money—whose would this be? Whose should it be, she asked herself, but her own? And already beginning the imaginary reign of splendour over which she had brooded so many years, a dream interrupted by Dick's return, she held her handkerchief to her eyes, and in the intervals of weeping indulged in delicious visions of grandeur.

Mr. Heathcote found Market Basing literally in tears. The people, nearly all tenants of the great Mortiboy estates, were gathered in knots, discussing the event. No news was come except by telegram, but there was scarcely any room for doubt. Dick Mortiboy was dead. The women wept aloud: the men in silence: all had lost a friend, the kindest hearted friend they ever had; the most ready to help, the most able to help. Not one to whom Dick, in his short reign of four months, had not done some kind action! not one who could not speak from experience of his soft heart and generous nature! As the farmer drove through the crowd that besieged the bank with inquiries, the fresh tears rose to his own eyes, and he got down at the door almost crying like a child.

No one cared about the old man now. Dead? Ready-Money dead? Well, he had been a long time dying. He had passed away, four months ago, from men's minds.

John Heathcote arrived at the bank, went through to the manager's office, where he found Ghrimes was there with Battiscombe, to whom Ghrimes had sent, after despatching his message to Parkside.

"Do you know of any will?" Mr. Battiscombe asked Ghrimes.

"None; I have the keys, I suppose we ought to look."

In Dick's private safe, business papers in plenty, but no will. Stay, a packet labelled "Private: to be opened after my death."

"Open it," said the lawyer.

Ghrimes opened and read it. It was short and concise. It was the confession of Polly Tresler. As he read it, his face assumed a puzzled expression. He handed it over to Mr. Battiscombe, who read it unmoved. Lawyers are seldom surprised at anything which appears abnormal to the rest of mankind. Ghrimes was shocked at the idea of Dick's secret marriage.

"That explains," he whispered, "the early quarrel between himself and his father. That is the reason why Dick ran away."

"Perhaps. It is hard to say. No great crime for a young fellow to be beguiled by a woman into making a fool of himself," said the lawyer. "It is as pretty a confession of bigamy—trigamy, even—as ever I read. Names, dates, churches, all given. Upon my word, this woman is an exceedingly clever person. It

is signed by her, and written by poor Mr. Mortiboy himself, dated too, only a fortnight ago. Mary Tresler—Mary Tresler—I know her, daughter of that drunken old gipsy woman who married my father's gardener, a long time ago. Ah! dear me!”

“What is to be done?”

“Clearly, we must first establish the truth of her statements. I think, Ghrimes, I had better go to town and see to this myself, to prevent complications. Meantime, say nothing to the Heathcotes—to anybody. There may, besides, be a will. To prevent raising hopes in their minds, tell them, what is quite true, that you don't know whether any will was made or not. You know, of course, that if there is no will, Mrs. Heathcote is the sole heiress—she inherits everything—everything.

Then Mr. Heathcote arrived.

“We must have a coroner's inquest,” said Mr. Battiscombe, “there must be a funeral—there is everything to be done. Will you come to town with me?”

“No—yes—what shall I do, Ghrimes?”

“Go, by all means. The train starts in half an hour. I will send a message to Parkside. Go up to town and see the last of your poor cousin.”

They went to London: down to Dick's chambers, where they found the doctor and the old woman in charge. The doctor was standing by the bedside, with his chin on his hands, thoughtfully gazing on the stark and stiff form which lay covered with a sheet. He gently took off the sheet from the face.

“You are his cousin?” he said. “I am taking a last look at the unfortunate man. It is a singularly handsome face; a face of wonderful sweetness and

goodness—a good man, I should say. And the most splendidly built man I ever saw. How *could* he have done it?”

The lawyer was reading Dick's last words, his only will and testament. John Heathcote solemnly looked upon the features of him who had been almost his own son.

“He says he did it by accident,” said Mr. Battiscombe.

“Yes—yes—but how? how? Look here,” the doctor drew back the sheet and showed the spot where the wound had been inflicted. “You see the place. Very well, then; now take this pencil, hold it any way you like, and see if you could shoot yourself in the left side, so far back, if the pencil was a pistol. I defy you to do it. It is very odd, yet he said he did it.”

Coroner's inquest that evening. Intelligent jury, after viewing the body, and reading the paper, Dick's last imposture—heard the doctor's doubts, and pooh-poohed them. Shot himself? of course he did. What did it matter how? As if a man would lie about such a thing as that. Verdict—“Accidental Death.” The worthy coroner adding some severe strictures upon the frequency of gun accidents, and men's carelessness in the handling of weapons.

Dick was dead. The good that he had time to do lives still; the lives that he quickened, which were dead under the weight of grinding poverty and servitude, if they have relapsed to their old misery, which some may have done, have still the memory of better times, the knowledge of better things, and therefore nourish a healthy discontent. The stirring of the blood which his example and his words caused: his oration

to the children which will never die out of their minds: his charity, for the first time in Market Basing, unconnected with religion and three sermons every Sunday: his sympathy with the fallen: his tenderness to the falling: his kind and rough wisdom: his unbookish maxims: his ready hand: his quick insight into humbug—all these things, and many more, make him to be remembered still. These live after him: the good that he did was a seed sown in fruitful soil, still growing up, destined to be in the after-years a goodly tree indeed. And the evil, does that still live? I know Palmiste pretty well, because I've lived in the island—he never did harm *there*, except to himself; well, you see, I haven't been to California, or to Texas, or to Mexico, so I do not know. If ever I do go to either or any of these places, I will inquire.

Poor old Ready-money was buried three days after his death in the family vault, unostentatiously, quietly. No one was present at his funeral but Ghrimes and Mr. Heathcote, with the lawyer. No one followed in token of respect. All his money had gone from him before he died. Therefore, all his respect. No property left; of course, he was no longer of any account.

It was felt that a public funeral was due to his son. Mr. Hopgood, the Mayor, had orders to prepare a simple funeral. But all Market Basing turned out to it. There was no mock mourning. It was no feeling of simple respect for property which brought all the women with the men to see the last of one who had been with them so brief a space, and had made himself so loved by all. Not one but had a kind word of his to remember him by: no poor man but had

more than a kind word: no eye that was dry when the earth rattled upon his coffin, and the sublime service of the Church was read over his remains.

His pensioners, the old men and women, were there, loudly wailing. Those whom he had saved from starvation, like old Mr. Sanderson, the cashier of Melli-ship's bank, were there; those whom he had saved from ruin, like little Tweedy, the builder; those whom he had saved from shame, like Sullivan, the clerk; those for whom he had ever found a word of rough sympathy, and a hand ready to help; above all, the children, awe-stricken and terrified, in whose memory he lived as the universal friend and benefactor. From highest to lowest, from Lord Hunslope to the beggarman, all came to shed tears over the untimely death of Dick Mortiboy. "Truly," said the rector, "charity covereth a multitude of sins."

It was all over now. His burly form was with them no more: the vault was closed; the service read; they would never again hear his ringing laugh, his soft and sympathetic voice. The women would no longer, if they were poor, go to him to pour out their tales of want; if they were well to do, look after him in the street, so handsome, so good, so soft-hearted, so strong. The men would no longer admire him for his skill and strength, or envy him for his prosperity. All was over. Dick Mortiboy was buried.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IF it was hard for Ghrimes, what, as the lawyer said, would it be for Frank?

He received the letter containing Dick Mortiboy's offer. It came on the Monday evening, the day before Dick's murder. He read it with an emotion which he thought he had almost conquered; for he read in it the signal to him to leave his uncongenial life, and go back to his own position. His heart beat high with joy. It was not only Dick's free and generous offer. It was Grace's command that he should take it. It was the recall of his sister and mother to the place where all their friends lived, and all their interests were centred. A letter of recall and pardon to an exile; the restoration of a prince to his own again.

"You've got good news, Mr. Melliship?" asked Patty, looking at his heightened colour, and flashing eyes.

"Good news? Yes, Patty, very good. The best possible. The best news that ever was brought to any poor, unlucky beggar."

But his pride. How was he to reconcile his pride to accepting help from the son of his father's enemy?

Pride—yes—he had some slight grounds for pride. In the first place he could be independent so long as his voice lasted. That great and splendid gift, a tenor voice, was his. It lay with him to accept Mr. Leweson's offer to go to Italy and study for a year or two, and then to return and make his fortune. It was cer-

tain that he could do so. But to return to the bank—to go back to the old life again!

He walked out to call on Mr. Eddrup.

The old man was dressed, and sitting on his chair, too feeble to move.

Frank told him the great offer which had been made him. Perfect confidence existed between the two, by this time. Frank had told him all his life, with its disappointments and misfortunes.

"Take it," said Mr. Eddrup. "I, too, have an offer to make you. I shall make it with all the more confidence, if I know that you are rich, and therefore can command the influence of wealth."

"What is it?"

"I have no children, no relations, except a few cousins, who are already wealthy, and who have lost sight of me for many, many years. I want to leave you all my money—in trust—in trust to find some one, if you can, to carry on the work which I have done. Would that you could carry it on yourself!"

"But how shall I find a man?"

"Silver is the man for you. He has enthusiasm; he has energy; he has the power of administration; he has sympathy. Let Silver be my successor."

"Then why not leave him the money in trust?"

"Because he would not quite understand; he would be trying to make it a means of forming a society with rules and creeds, and so crystallize and kill what I want to grow and develop. Remember, young man, faith is the fertilizer; creed is the destroyer. Further, I want you to bequeath the property, after your death, so that it may be used by your successor—whom you will have to find—in the same spirit. I will not lay

down rules. I will not add another to the Charities which do already so much harm. I want my money to be used always in the most intelligent manner possible to the time:—never by a committee.”

On Wednesday afternoon he sat down to write his letter. As he began—“My dear Dick,” a boy came shouting down the street, with an early edition of the *Echo*.

Frank, moved by some impulse, opened the window and beckoned the boy. Then he left his letter-writing for a while, and leisurely began to read.

Presently, Patty knocked at the door. She found him staring vacantly before him, with the paper in his hands. The last two days had been a time of trial for the poor girl. She saw, by Frank’s manner, on Monday, that something was going to happen—she knew not what—which would sever him from her. She had been striving herself, bitterly, but steadily, to look the truth in the face. Frank did not love her. In spite of his kind ways and little attentions, the sweeter to Patty because she had never known them before, and was never to know them again, he had never loved her. And she, poor girl, had given all her heart to him. For his sake she spent sleepless nights, devising things which would please him; and careful days watching to see if she had pleased him. All the little arts which she knew, few enough, she practised to catch his eye. For him she had learned to despise the calling in which she had once almost gloried, and herself for practising it.

She sat down before him, and waited, hands clasped, for him to speak.

"Patty," he said at last, seeing her beside him, "a dreadful thing has happened. Read that. He was my cousin—I was to have been his partner—and now he is dead. I was writing to him when I bought the paper—I am a beggar again!"

"Then you are just the same as you were last Sunday?" Her heart gave a little exultant bound.

"The same? No. Are you the same if, when you are thirsty, some one dashes the cup from your lips? You are thirsty still, you say. Yes, but you are more than thirsty. You are maddened. Patty, I have had the cup dashed from my lips. I cannot think of poor Dick Mortiboy. I can only think of myself. I am only selfish in my sorrow."

The final blow had fallen. Patty turned white, and bit her lips; for the blood left her cheeks, and she felt as if she would faint. Presently he made an effort to speak.

"How can I go to her now—to the girl I love? How can I say—take me—I am a beggar, and you an heiress—take me?"

"If she loves you, what matter does it make? If I loved a man do you think it would matter to me that I had—oh! hundreds of pounds and he had nothing? Mr. Melliship, if she loves you, you must go to her. Perhaps I don't understand. I always thought that when people loved each other they don't care for money. Is it not so? I mean rich people; of course we poor people never think about it, because we never have any money to think about at all. That is a good thing for us, so far. Tell me more, Mr. Melliship. Does she know that you love her still? Have you promised each other?"

"Yes—too late! Yes—long ago—when I was rich."

"And—and—but I suppose I can't understand. Are you too proud to go to her? But she knows you have no money—there is nothing to hide. If you loved her before, of course you go on loving her now. Do all ladies' hearts change when they have money? What is her name?"

"Grace Heathcote."

"Grace Heathcote—a pretty name—Grace Heathcote. Does she live in the same town with your cousin who is dead?—what is it?" She looked at the paper again: "Market Basing?"

"Near it; ten miles out, at a place called Hunslope. At Parkside Farm."

"At Hunslope, ten miles out. At Parkside Farm," she repeated. Then she got up, with lips that quivered in spite of her courage, and went away.

On Saturday, after their early dinner, she plucked up courage to speak to her father.

"Father—I want to say something to you—two things—I can no longer go on at the Palace. Don't call me ungrateful, after the pains you've took, and all that—I'm not ungrateful, but I can't bear it any longer. I didn't know, till Mr. Melliship came and talked to me, that there was anything in it. I thought it was something to be proud of. But now I can't bear the dress, and I see the women in the place sneering, and the horrid men laughing, as I never saw them before—before Mr. Melliship came."

"Mr. Melliship? Mr. Melliship? Is he in love with you, Patty?"

"No, father," she answered, bursting into tears;

"he never loved me; he never said a word of love to me. But, I—oh! I'm only a silly girl—and I fancied he might take a fancy to me. Forgive me, father. It is all folly and wickedness. He loves another girl—a lady. What am I, that I should take the fancy of a gentleman? Only a poor trapeze girl; only a common thing. I can't write well; I can't dress well; I can't do anything—I don't know how—that he likes. I have tried—oh! how I have tried—and he so good. He never laughed at me. But I could see the difference that he felt. Let him go back to his own people, and let me be alone."

The prophet turned his eyes upon the portrait.

"Jephthah's daughter," he murmured. "Jephthah's daughter—I knew it all along."

"And I can't act any more," said Patty. "Tell Mr. Leweson so. He is very good to us. But I can't do it."

"I've told him, Patty. I've told him. For I had some news for you that I thought would keep till to-morrow. See, now. This is the last night of our performance. You and I and Joey act to-night for the last time. They've got another family—a poor sort, Patty, compared to you and me—but there they are. They begin on Monday. I meant to tell you to-morrow. But I can't keep it. I am to be Mr. Eddrup's clerk. His clerk, Patty, so long as he lives. Think of that. With a salary. I'm to preach every Sunday. And when Mr. Eddrup dies, Mr. Melliship is to have all his money, in trust for the poor people. For these, and all other mercies, God's holy name be praised."

Patty was silent for a moment.

"I've been very selfish and vain with my foolish-

ness, father. Now the other thing I had to say: I want a whole sovereign, father, and I want to go away early to-morrow, and be away all day; perhaps all Sunday night and Monday morning. Let me go, and don't ask me the reason why. That is my secret. Give me the money and let me go. I must go. My heart is breaking till I go. Mr. Eddrup would say I am right. I know he would. Father, if you doubt me, I will go and ask him myself if I am not right."

"Nay; if he thinks you are right, I've got nothing to say. Does Mr. Melliship send you?"

"No——no——no——" she crimsoned violently. "Don't say a word to him about it. A secret, father, and not my own. Oh, don't say a word against it. Because I must do it. I must, indeed. It is somebody else's secret. And even he doesn't know."

"I suppose it is Mr. Melliship's, then?"

She turned scarlet.

"It is, father," she whispered, "and it is for his good. Give me the money and let me go."

"A great sum, Patty. But you're a good girl, and you shall have your own way. I wish it wasn't Sunday, because I'm going to tell the story, in the afternoon, of the Roman Catholic priests. I've been getting it out of Ezekiel; and you'd have liked to hear it, no doubt."

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. HEATHCOTE is heiress to all. The gigantic estate of the Mortiboyes, little impaired by Dick's lavish expenditure, is hers, to have and to hold. The fact has been communicated to her officially by Mr. Battiscombe. No will had been made. No frittering away of a great property by miserable bequests: nothing left to collateral branches of the family; Ghrimes and the Melliships out of it altogether. All Mrs. Heathcote's.

In the first stupor of delight she sat tranquil, scarcely able to face the fact that she was rich beyond her dreams. Then, and before poor Dick was buried, she began to make plans and settle how they were in future to live. She talked, the sealed fountain of her ambition once set moving again, perpetually on this one topic—what they should do, what changes they were to make in their style of living, how they were to astonish the world.

"We shall, of course," she said to her daughter, "go to London to live. Your father must give up his vulgar habits."

"My father has no vulgar habits," said Grace, always rebellious.

"Grace, don't contradict. Is it, or is it not, vulgar to smoke pipes after dinner?" No answer being given to this clincher, she went on. "We shall dine at half-past seven; go into society; balls, I suppose, every night; we shall be presented at court, of course; your father will give up his poky farm, and we shall buy

an estate somewhere. Ghrimes will go on managing the bank, though I must say the salary he draws seems ridiculous. Pictures again: I suppose we must patronize Art. My dear, it will be very hard work at first, but you may trust your mother to do the best for you; and when my girls do marry—if they marry with my approbation—” giving a glance at Grace, “they may depend upon my generosity.”

“I am going to marry Frank Melliship,” said Grace, quickly. Lucy said nothing. It was a constant trial to the poor girls to bear this grating upon their nerves; the more trying because they had to disguise it even from each other, and because it was so essentially different to that straightforward, honest simplicity, and even delicacy, of their father. There are some men without the slightest refinement in manner, not at all the men to be invited to dinner, who are yet the most perfect and absolute masters of good breeding inasmuch as they never offend in their speech, and go delicately about among the tender corns of their friends. Such was John Heathcote. To him the doctor communicated the three or four lines which Dick had forced him to write. John took them to lawyer Battiscombe, in hopes that they would give his girls a claim to the estate which else his wife would have. What manner of life his would be if Lydia Heathcote got it all, he trembled to think. No use, the money was all his wife’s. Battiscombe told him of Polly; he explained the law of the land as regards married women’s property; and advised him as to the carrying out of Dick’s intentions, in the spirit, if not in the letter.

Thus fortified, Farmer John felt himself strong

enough to fight his battles, and began to put his foot down.

He let his wife run on till she was fairly exhausted, on the subject of improvements and changes, then he quietly asserted himself:—

“When you’ve done making your plans, Lydia, you may as well consult me, and ascertain what I am going to do.”

“John Heathcote, who is the owner of the Mortiboy property?” asked Lydia with withering contempt.

“I am. Your husband is.”

She gasped with astonishment.

“Do you mean to tell me, John Heathcote, that I am not the possessor of everything.”

“Certainly not. All the personalty is mine absolutely. All the realty is mine so long as you live. When you die, you may bequeath it to whom you will.”

“Is that the law? Do you dare to assert that the law of England allows that? And they call this a Christian and a Protestant country.”

“Let us understand one another, Lydia. We are plain people, and intend to remain so. You and I are old, and unfit for the society to which we were not brought up——”

“John—I unfit. Pray, do you forget that I was seven years at the best and most select boarding-school in Market Basing?”

“I dare say they finished you very well for a farmer’s wife, such as you’ve been for five-and-twenty years. No, no; we are too old and too wise to change, Lyddy. No town life for us. I mean to go on exactly the same.”

"You imagine, John, that I am going to consent to live like that, with all the money coming in? Do you call yourself a churchman, John? Do you know that it's your duty—your positive duty—to keep up your station? I, for one, shall not consent. So there."

"You need not, Lyddy," said her husband, quietly. "If you refuse, you must live elsewhere. And I don't know where you'll find the money. Don't be down-cast, wife. A little extra finery you can have, if you like, and spend anything in reason, consistent with your position. I'm a farmer. The girls can spend the money when they marry. Another thing: whatever Dick intended to do, it is our duty to do. Now read that."

He put into his wife's hands Dick's last few words.

"Poor Dick! His last wishes. We must obey them."

"Papa," said Grace, eagerly, "you are really going to do all that Dick intended should be done?"

"All, Grace. Everything."

"Then consult George Ghrimes about another thing, papa. Ask him what Dick was going to do about him; and—ask, papa——"

"If there's secrets going on, I suppose I had better go," said her mother. "John Heathcote, when I married you, little did I think that I was marrying a man capable of sheltering himself behind the law, in order that he might continue in his low and grovelling position."

John Heathcote laughed. It was never his plan to argue with his wife, else the argument would have been perennial.

The next day, being three days after the funeral, Mrs. Heathcote thought she might as well make a visit to Derngate and the villa, and take possession of the things there, whatever there might be to have.

The garden door was open, and the front door was open.

She walked into the dining-room—no one there—and into Dick's smoking-room.

In his easy chair, in deepest widow's weeds, with a handkerchief to her eyes, sat Polly.

It was her greatest *coup*, though it failed. She learned the death of Dick from the papers, and instantly made up her mind what to do. Without going through the formality of acquainting Captain Bowker with her intentions, she bought a widow's cap and crape, got into the train, and came to Market Basing. She would get her confession back first, and then, after laying hands on everything portable, would come to such terms as could, in a short space of time, and before the thing was found out, be obtained.

"Mary!" cried Mrs. Heathcote, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Mrs. Richard Mortiboy, Mrs. Heathcote, I should say Cousin Heathcote," said Polly, wiping her eyes again. "Oh, what a dreadful thing it is to lose your husband, and him but just returned from foreign parts and savages."

"Mary! woman! you are mad!"

She shook her head, and sobbed the faster.

"Poor Dick! I shall never see his like again. Mrs. Heathcote, won't you sit down? It's my house, and all Dick's money is mine; but we sha'n't fall out. Families ought to live peaceful. Sit down, young ladies."

Grace knew that she was speaking the truth, but silence was best. They remained standing. Polly still gave from time to time a convulsive heave, by which she meant to express the poignancy of her sorrow.

"Perhaps you will explain yourself, Mary Tresler," said her late mistress.

"Ho! there's no objection of explaining. None in the world, Mrs. Heathcote, Cousin Heathcote. I've been married to Dick Mortiboy for twelve years and more, married in London, at St. Pancriddle's Church, where you may go yourself and look. And now I'm come to claim my rights, as in duty bound, and an honest woman should. Don't think I'm bearing any malice for old times, Mrs. Heathcote, though you always were a screw, and you know it. It isn't the place now nor the time, when I'm weeping over the last bier of my poor dear lost Dick, to throw your cold mutton and your broken victuals in your teeth; no, nor your eight pounds a year, paid to your cousin's lawful wife, nor your flannels at Christmas. No; let's be friends all round, I say. I only come up this morning, and here I'm going to stick. Perhaps, as you are here, you'll tell me where Dick's safe is, where he keeps his papers, because that's mine, that is, and there's something particular of my own that I want back again."

It was awkward for Polly, in the execution of her grand *coup*, that she had no conception where the safe was, in which she knew that her written confession lay, nor indeed what a safe was like when she saw one. She had a notion that it was a wooden box; kept probably in his bedroom, the breaking open of

which would put her in possession of the dangerous document. But she could find no wooden box, though she had searched the whole house through, and she naturally began to feel uneasy. Where had Dick put it? Mrs. Heathcote was speechless. This, indeed, was a calamity far worse than the obstinacy of her husband. That the perfidious Dick should actually have had a wife, her own servant, and have said nothing to anybody, was a thing so utterly beyond the scope of her experience, that her brain seemed to be wandering. Her lips parted, but she said nothing.

"Oh, it's a dreadful thing," Polly went on, "to be a widow. And me so young; and such a good husband. I hope you may never experience it, Mrs. Heathcote; never, Cousin Heathcote. It's a dreadful thing, and money won't make up for it. What's money to the loss of my Dick?"

"Grace," said Mrs. Heathcote, "am I in my senses? Is this woman mad?"

"Woman!" cried the bereaved one, starting up in a violent rage. "No more woman than you are. How dare you call me woman? For two pins, Mrs. Heathcote, I'd scratch out your eyes. You and your cold mutton, indeed, and no followers allowed. But I'll comb you down yet, you see if I don't."

The door opened, and Mr. Ghrimes appeared. In his hand a bundle of papers.

"Oh," he said, coolly, seeing Polly, "Joe, the stable-boy, told me you were here. Now what may you be wanting in this house? No nonsense, you know, because it won't do with me."

"Mr. Ghrimes, my clerk," said Polly, "my servant and the manager of my bank; don't be insolent, young

man, or I'll give you warning, and send you about your business, sharp enough; so down on your knees, if *you* please. Other people can manage a bank as well as you." All the same, her heart misgave her at the sight of the calm cold man of business, who evidently knew exactly what he was saying, and was not a whit moved at her brave words.

"We will talk about discharging afterwards. At present, you had better go yourself. Yes; I mean that you must go, and that at once. Any insults to these ladies will be severely punished. Now go, or I will speak more plainly."

"I sha'n't go." Polly sat herself down in the arm-chair, and spread out her skirts in a very determined manner.

"You won't? Very well." Mr. Ghrimes stepped outside. Voices were heard, and steps in the passage, and Polly's cheek visibly blanched.

He came back. Behind him were Mr. Battiscombe, Farmer John, and a third person, a stranger to the rest, at sight of whom, Polly sprang up and sat down again, as if she had received a mortal blow. He was a middle aged man, with a red beard, and blue eyes, and a nervous hesitating manner, who came with the others half unwillingly; no other, in fact, than Captain Bowker.

"Now, madam," said Mr. Ghrimes, "who is this gentleman?"

"Oh," said Polly, "I'll take it out of you for this. Only you wait."

"Let me explain," said the lawyer. "We suspected your little game, you see, and we took our steps—had you watched, followed you to the station, found where

you were going to, and brought Captain Bowker, *your husband*, down after you by the next train."

"Her husband!" cried Mrs. Heathcote. "You wicked, wicked woman! Mr. Battiscombe, what is the extreme penalty which the law exacts for this offence? Is it twenty years, or is it fifty? I forget at this moment. I know they used to hang for it in the good old days."

"What's more," said the captain in a husky voice, "they've told me your whole history, and I find I can be free whenever I like. So, Polly, you may go your own way. By the Lord, if you come near me again, I *will* be free, and you shall be in a prison. I'm going back to Skimp's. You shan't say I hid myself. There I stay—find me out there if you dare."

"You calf of a sea captain, do you think I want to come with you? I despise you too much," said Polly grandly.

"And her mother in the workhouse!" ejaculated Mrs. Heathcote, as if the fact had an important bearing on the case.

"Had you not better go now?" asked Ghrimes. "It will be well for you to go by the next train; it leaves in twenty minutes. I will drive you to the station."

Polly removed the white cap of widowhood, and laid it on the table.

"You may have it, Mrs. Heathcote, mum. Keep it for my sake, and be very careful about your cold pork. Go on locking up the key of the beer cellar, and don't let the maids have no followers, then you'll go on being as much beloved as you always have been much beloved, if you go on, that is, as you always have been a going on. Good-bye, young ladies. Miss

Grace, I'd do you a good turn if I could, because you deserve it, and you know why: you was always the best of the bunch. Good-bye, Miss Lucy; eat and drink a bit more, and don't read too many tracts, and you'll be as pretty as your sister some day, but never so good. She knows how to hold her tongue, she does. One good thing," she concluded, looking at her husband with a gaze of concentrated hatred, which caused his knees to shake beneath him, "one good thing, one gracious good thing, I'm rid of a poor-spirited barrel of salt sea pork. I sha'n't see you no more. Ugh! you and your verses! If I get home first, I'll BURN 'em all."

"You can't, Polly," said her husband meekly; "I've got 'em in my coat-tail pocket, every one, with a new 'Ode to Resignation,' which I composed when you were asleep."

She passed out, holding her head high. Ghrimes followed her, and drove her to the station.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It is Sunday, nearly a fortnight after Dick's death. The Heathcotes, returned from church, are on the lawn in front of the house. The noise of wheels on the private road leading to the farm is heard, an unusual thing, unless when poor Dick Mortiboy drove over on Sunday.

It was a town "fly,"—one of those delightful vehicles which are found at country stations, which have all the bad qualities of the London growler with-

out any of its good ones, always supposing that it has good ones. It drove up to the door, and a girl got down and looked timidly at the group on the lawn. A pretty girl, a wonderfully pretty girl, pale faced, bright eyed, with regular if rather commonplace features, and a great mass of rich brown hair, neatly dressed in a coloured stuff frock, brown jacket, and a bundle of wild flowers in her hand. She could not resist the temptation of stopping the fly, to pick them from the hedge. She opened the gate, and walked in, colouring painfully.

Mr. Heathcote slowly walked down the gravel path to meet her.

"Mr. Heathcote?" she asked. "Oh! I don't want you—I want Miss Grace Heathcote. Which is Miss Grace Heathcote?"

"I am Grace Heathcote. Pray what can I do for you?"

Patty—it was Patty Silver—looked at her for a few minutes, and then, clasping her hands together, burst into tears.

For she contrasted herself with the girl who stood before her: herself, common, half educated, badly dressed, with this presence of a lady, glorious in her beauty and her grace.

The unconscious rival looked at her in wonder, but did not speak.

"Let me speak somewhere alone with you, Miss Heathcote," said Patty, "quite alone. I have something very important to tell you."

"Papa, I am going to take this young lady to the drawing-room. Do not wait dinner for me. Come with me, please."

She sailed across the lawn, taking poor little Patty after her, into the drawing-room where Mrs. Heathcote heard the door shut and locked.

"John," she cried, putting her head out of the window, "pray who is that young woman?"

"I don't know," said John.

"John, if you were half a husband, to say nothing of a father, you would have known that it was your duty to bring her to me first. Secrets, indeed; I will have no secrets in my house, I can tell you. Grace, let me in this moment."

"Is that you, mamma?" answered her daughter, in the clear resolute tones which always made her mother quail and give way, "Is that you, mamma? Go on with dinner; do not wait for me; I shall be ready presently."

Mrs. Heathcote knocked once more at the door, but faintly, and finding no attention bestowed upon her, retreated again.

Dinner was served, but Grace did not return. So they sat down without her, John Heathcote alone being able to take his meal with the usual Sabbath enjoyment.

"I believe, John," said his wife, "that you would go on eating if the world was on fire."

"Well, Lyddy, if my not eating could put out the fire, I would stop. If not, I dare say I should eat so long as I was hungry, unless the fire was burning my toes."

"John—you are blasphemous. On Sunday, too, and your daughter locked up with a stranger, talking secrets!"

"What if she is? Grace's secrets are not mine. There can't be any harm in Grace's secrets, poor girl,

and she's welcome to a bushel of them. Something to do with Frank, I expect. That reminds me, Lydia. A week before his death, Dick had a deed of partnership drawn out, but not executed, between himself, Frank Melliship, and George Ghrimes."

"Not executed," said Lydia.

"No—but the intention was the same. I have had it drawn out again between myself, Frank Melliship, and George Ghrimes, on poor Dick's plan. I am going to take them both into partnership with me."

"John Heathcote," said his wife, "it is a dreadful thing, a really dreadful thing to see the way you are going on. If this partnership is carried into effect, I shall feel it my duty, as a wife and a mother—to—to——"

"What will you do, Lydia?"

"To call in London doctors, and have your brain examined for Softening. It *must* be Softening, John."

John put down his knife and fork, and laughed till the tears ran down his face. The idea of his brain softening was so novel, so unexpected, so good, that he laughed again and again. He was not in the least angry.

"You always would have your joke, Lyddy," he said, with a choke. "Softening. Ho! ho! ho! And you've always called me the hardest man you know. But I'm glad you approve of the partnership. Very glad. Because, though I *am* the administrator of all this money, I always feel that I'm doing it for you, Lyddy. It's well you are a good-hearted woman—very well. Some women would have made a fuss, and objected. Not you. That's what I like about you, wife. You never object when it's no good, and you're

always ready to back me up when I'm doing what's right."

I have never been able to make up my mind, whether this speech of John's was stupid, or whether it was sarcastic. I fancy it was the latter, and that John was by no means so simple as his wife thought him.

"Now," said Grace, in the drawing-room, "sit down, and tell me what you came to tell me."

She sat on the sofa and Patty on the easy chair by her side. The girl was lost in contemplating the length to which civilization can go in furnishing a room; the bright draperies and the dainty appointments. She looked up hesitatingly.

"Do all ladies have rooms like this?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Why? There is nothing very grand in this room, is there?"

Patty sighed. "You should see mine," she said, "and you would know what I mean.—Miss Heathcote, I came to-day from London. I come from Mr. Melliship."

"From Frank?"

"From Mr. Frank Melliship. He does not know I'm come. Let me tell my story from the beginning. He lives with father. So we know him, you see. Last Monday week I saw him reading a letter, and looking bright and happy. You know, miss, he'd been terribly pulled down and worried of late. He told me he had got good news—the best of news—and he went out, and up the street I saw him walking as if the ground was made of india-rubber. Then he came home, and sang all over the house like a lark. Next day, Tuesday that was, he said to me, 'Patty,'—he always calls me Patty, miss, because father does, I suppose,—

‘Patty, I sha’n’t write my letter till to-morrow, because I’m waiting to find out how to answer the most generous man in the world.’ And he pleased himself all day drawing pictures—such pictures—I’ve got them all. On Wednesday, I went in at half-past two. He had his writing-table before him, and he had the *Echo* in his hand. ‘Patty,’ he said, ‘he’s dead—and she is lost to me!’”

Grace turned colour. “Go on,” she said.

“‘She’s lost to me!’ Then he told me all about you, Miss Heathcote; how he loved you, and you loved him; and how Mr. Mortiboy was going to make him rich, so that you could marry, but he died and could not. And then he told me that he could never go to you now, because you were rich and he was a beggar. This was last Wednesday week. He told me with the tears running down his handsome face, where you lived, and all about it. . . . Well, Miss Heathcote, he’s been getting lower and lower ever since; he doesn’t eat, he doesn’t sing, he never draws, he sits at the window with his head in his hands, and never speaks at all. I couldn’t bear to see it; so I bought a railway guide, and found out the Sunday trains, and made father give me money to pay my return ticket, and came down here to tell you all about it. Miss Heathcote, it can’t be that you’re going to throw him over because you are rich? It can’t be that you don’t love him any more because he is poor? Don’t tell me that—don’t let him go on killing himself. Don’t be proud. Ladies are mostly too proud, I think. And so are gentlemen. He will never come to you. Oh, Miss Heathcote, if I loved—if he loved me—and I was rich, I would go to him and kiss him, and say, Frank, what

does it matter whether you have any money or not?—I am only a poor girl, Miss Heathcote, and no education, and get my living in a way I am almost ashamed to say—I'm a trapeze girl—but I should be too proud—oh, I should be too proud to let my love die when a word would save him."

"What is your name?" asked Grace, the tears running down her face.

"Patty Silver. I am only the girl that performs on the trapeze, at the Music Hall. I do it with my father, though."

"Patty Silver—you love Frank Melliship, yourself."

Patty covered her face with her hands.

"I do—I do—" she murmured. "Forgive me, Miss Heathcote. He never looked at me. I let myself love him without thinking. Who could help loving him? But he only loves you. He thinks of you. He draws your portrait always. Me? As if a gentleman like Mr. Melliship would think of me. But I loved him—oh! me—me—I loved him, and I love him always."

Grace knelt down, and took Patty's face in her hands, and looked at it.

"Poor Patty! Poor little girl! You will get over your love some day. Your trial is hard. What shall I do for you, for the joy and gladness you have brought me? I knew he would be faithful; but you know—girls are so—there were times when I doubted. Now wait a moment: you will see that I am not too proud, and not so cold a fine lady as you think me, perhaps. Wait here for one moment only."

She went into the dining-room, where her father was just opening a bottle of port.

"Papa, come into the other room with me."

"More secrets, of course," said Mrs. Heathcote.

John Heathcote, with a sigh, followed his daughter.

"Papa, this young lady comes to me, unknown to Frank, to tell me that he is ill and miserable. He got a letter from Dick the day before his death, offering him a partnership in the bank. Then he saw the death in the paper, and has been prostrated ever since. What ought we to do?"

"First thing, let him know that he is to be a partner. Make him a new offer."

"You must do that, yourself. What next?"

"Why, we must go and find him out as soon as we can, and bring him back here."

"What a good father it is!" said his daughter, wheedling him. "He always says the wisest things, and the kindest things. We must find him. Patty here will take us to him; you must tell him—you must go yourself; we must find him at once—we will go together—at once—to-day, by the afternoon train. We will go back with Patty—will we not?"

Here she gave way, and fell upon Patty's neck, crying and laughing. Lucy came running up stairs. Her mother stayed below.

"They may manage their own secrets themselves," she said, taking a glass of port with a bitter feeling.

"Lucy, my dear. My carpet bag with things for the night, and your sister's, too. Pack up quickly. Grace, take this young lady with you, and have some

dinner, and give her some." He went down, and found his wife in a sour and crabbed frame.

"Lyddy, my dear," he said, with a cheerful smile, "I've got good news for you; we've found Frank Melliship. I'm going up to town with Grace to bring him back. He's all right. We'll marry them in a month, and you shall dance at their wedding, my girl. Give me a glass of wine."

He drank off hers, without an apology. "Oh! I forgot to tell you—keep this a great secret—I had a talk with Lord Hunslope yesterday about things. He hinted that though Grace would not have Lord Launton, perhaps his lordship would have better luck with Lucy. Eh! Lyddy, what do you think of a coronet for your girl?"

"Lucy, dear girl! she always was my own girl—took after my family and me," said Mrs. Heathcote, mollified. "Grace was always a Heathcote. Well, well, you must have your own way, I suppose. Come back to-morrow, John, if you can. Dear Lucy!—how she would become a coronet. After all, John, I hardly think poor dear Grace is quite the woman to be a countess. There's a little too much independence about her; too much of the Heathcote about her; not quite subdued enough in her manner. She will do admirably as a banker's wife, no doubt. Is the young person properly looked after?"

"Grace will do that."

"Then sit down, John, for five minutes and talk. Don't be racing up and down the stairs after dinner. At your time of life, too. You might get apoplexy, and go off suddenly, like poor Mr. Hawthorne, only

three weeks ago. You think the earl means what he says?"

"The earl is straightforward enough, at any rate. He is poor and we are rich. Think on what we ought to give Lucy if it comes off. Don't say anything to the girl. She's as timid as a fawn, and would only run away and hide herself. But think what we ought to give, and tell me. The earl—whisper now—owes the bank fifty thousand pounds. There, wife; I've given you something to think over while I am gone."

Mrs. Heathcote kissed Grace with a really maternal affection again, whispering: "Bring him back, dear; you have your mother's approbation now. But you must forgive me for being a little disappointed before, you know. He was always my favourite, Frank, after poor Dick. As for Lord Launton, I forgive you. And no doubt it is all for the best. Give Frank my best love, dear—and bless you."

* * * * *

Frank was sitting in his little room alone and miserable. Mr. Silver was gone off to chapel. There was nobody in the house. A cab came rumbling along the street, and stopped at the door. He did not hear it.

Patty opened the door with her latch-key, and led her guests upstairs. He looked up as they came into the room. It was Grace, with her father.

"Frank," whispered Grace, as he caught her in his arms, "you were too proud to come to us, so we have come to you."

"Not to let you go again, my boy," said her father, shaking him by the hand.

"Never again, Frank, never again. We part no more."

Love and joy in that little room. Upstairs, Patty lying on her bed, trying to stop the tears and sobs that shake her frame. The prophet was right. She was even as the daughter of Jephthah, doomed to lament her loneliness among the mountains all her days.

E N V O Y.

THREE farewell tableaux. The first in Paris. It is at St. Cloud, when, close by the ruins of the château, in a small, close room, they are trying the Communist prisoners in the winter of last year. A long table, or a platform, behind which are sitting a dozen officers, whose cold, stern faces bode little mercy to the poor creatures brought before them. One by one they are brought up to receive their sentence. They are cowed by imprisonment and suffering; they are ragged, starved, miserable. Mostly, they receive their sentences, which are comparatively light, with a kind of gratitude, because they know the worst. There is one exception. He is a thin man, with keen, bright eyes. His cheeks and chin are covered with the ragged beard of three months' growth. His black hair is thick and matted; his clothes, such as they are, scarcely hold together upon him. He alone of the prisoners stands up before his judges with an air of defiance. Accused at first of being taken with arms in his hand, he is now, on further evidence, charged with complicity in the murder of the archbishop. He has neither boots nor shoes; a rag is round his neck; he shivers in the cold December air; but his hands are delicate, shapely, and white—the hands of a gentleman. He is asked his name and profession. He shrugs his shoulders and spreads out his hands.

“Bah! It is the hundredth time. I am tired of it.

Let us finish. My name is Lafleur. I was in the ranks of the Commune. Did I love the cause of the Communist? No more than yourselves. Do I love your cause? Perhaps as much as you do. Did I assist at the execution of the archbishop? I did. Now, M. le Président, your sentence."

It came swiftly enough.

In the cold grey of the morning, he stands against a wall with his hands in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth, and a mocking smile on his lips. No word of repentance? None. Of scoffing or blasphemy? None. The roll of the rifles for a moment, and the next, a dead man falls, face downward, on the ground. He could bear most things that fate had to bring; but the misery, the filth, the degradation, the starvation, the cold, rags, famine, evil companionship, to which the Versaillists have condemned their unhappy enemies, were too much for him. So he confessed—threw up the cards—and was sentenced.

Down at the docks there is a certain particularly dirty and muddy crossing, which requires in all weathers, so deeply rooted is its delight in mud, the constant attendance of a broom. It is wielded by a boy, small and thin, but strong and healthy. He answers to the name of Bill. On sunny days he is accompanied by a friend, older than himself, with a curiously wizened and lined countenance, like that of an old man. He does not work himself, but sits in the sunshine on the steps of a door which is never opened. Here the cold winds come not, and there is a southern aspect.

"Thoozy," says the boy, "it's more than a year since Uncle Dick died."

"So it is, old chap, so it is. Poor Uncle Dick! But we've done pretty well since then, haven't we, old chap? What's the whole duty of a boy, Bill, as he used to learn you?"

"Never prig, never tell lies—" he runs off Dick's ten commandments on his fingers, just as he had been taught.

"Right you are, Bill. Go away from England. Yes, we'll go some day, old chap, when we've saved a little money, and you've got stronger. Uncle Dick was a good sort, Bill, I can tell you. We shan't meet no more Uncle Dicks in the world. Let's remember all he used to say, and act on it, Bill, my boy."

Another scene. It is evening: three people are standing in the moonlight, in the square, place, or principal open street of Market Basing, before a newly-erected statue, unveiled that morning with much ceremony, bands of music, and many speeches. They are Frank and Grace, with them Patty Silver.

"I am glad it is like Dick," said Grace, with a sigh. "I couldn't bear that our noble Dick should look ugly and unlike. I'll tell you about him, Patty, some day, when we have it all to ourselves, and you want to learn a long story about a good and a great-hearted man. Let us go in now. I wanted to see it when all the people were gone, and have a little cry all to myself over it."

Patty is staying with them. She has given up her profession, and lives with her father; he preaches

every evening, and will probably some day be revered as the founder of a new sect. Life is made easy for him by Mr. Edrupp, who lingers still, and by Grace Melliship, Frank's wife. Patty will never marry. To have loved a gentleman, not to have been loved by one, has been an education for the girl. She can never love one of her own class. But she is not unhappy, and among the poor people of her neighbourhood finds plenty to do in the way of help and advice. And sometimes Grace gets her to come down to Market Basing, and stay quietly with them till the roses come back to her cheeks, and she can return to her work, a life of unknown and unprofessional self-denial and toil.

Last time I was at Market Basing I made a curious discovery. Looking at Dick's statue, I read the inscription. The usual flourish of trumpets was on the front, setting forth his unblemished moral character, his philanthropy, his generosity, his great schemes for benefiting the human race. On one side was a passage in Greek:—

“Πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων ἵδεν ἄστεα καὶ νοὸν ἔγνων.”

This was the rector's doing.

On the other side was a line of English:—

“Write me as one who loves his fellow-men.”

This was Ghrimes's.

On the back, right in the corner, as if put there furtively, in quite small letters, “Rev. XIII. 4.” I heard afterwards that Lucy Heathcote, or, to give her new name, Lady Launton, chose a text, which, not

being approved of, she privately instructed the sculptor to insert where it could not be seen, anxious, good little soul, that religion should have some part. The sculptor put it in, but made a mistake as to the reference—a most unfortunate one, as I found on looking out the text to which attention is thus publicly called. By great good luck, nobody but Lady Launton and myself has found it out.

THE END.

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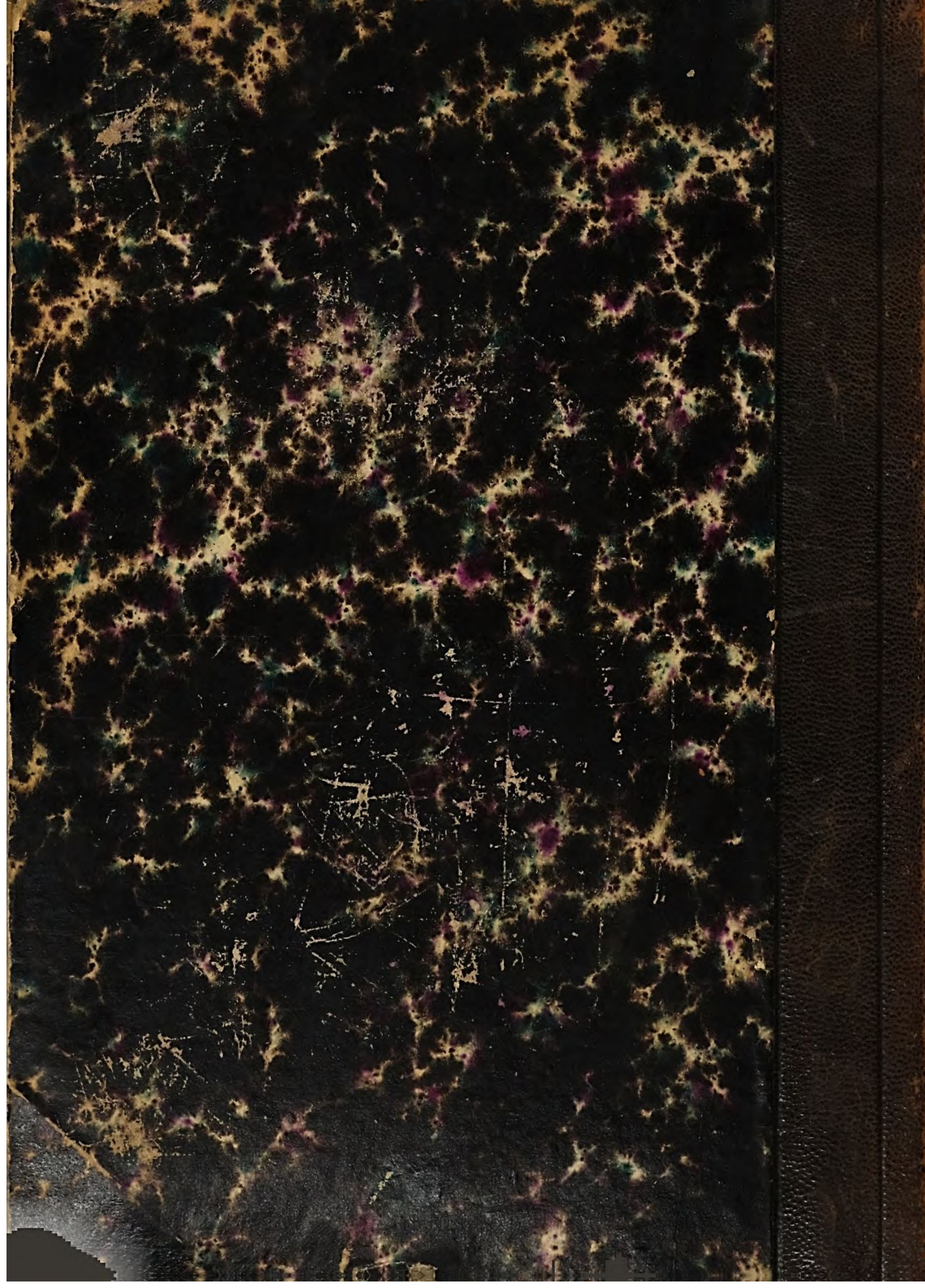
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